

IN UNITY

and
The Gay Christian

WINTER '76/'77

THE NEWS AND OPINION JOURNAL OF THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES



The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them . . .
. . . They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah
as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

LGB.



The Rev. Nancy Wilson
— Staff photo



The Rev. Charlie Arehart
— Photo by Campart Photos

Called To Be Servants

THE REV. ELDER NANCY WILSON

I was born in July of 1950, in Mineola, New York, and grew up in Plainview, Long Island. My parents, two younger brothers and I attended Hicksville Methodist Church.

At about the age of 12 or 13, I began to seriously study and question my faith.

In the summer of 1963, I had what might be called a "conversion" experience. All that summer I had been experiencing intense feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and general "lostness." I secretly read my Bible, and asked all kinds of questions. But nothing helped. I felt alienated from everyone and everything. Finally, one night, I believe God through Jesus Christ broke through and touched me. It was a very private and undramatic experience. But it was a definite turning point in my life. I knew then that I was God's, and that *that* one assurance was enough to sustain me my whole life long.

Then the nagging started. And sleepless nights in which I came to believe that God was preparing and calling me. Martin Buber ways. "We must believe in Destiny

and that it stands in need of us." At that time I began to sense that I was going to be needed somewhere.

I began to become more involved in my home church — a very large, prosperous, liberal Methodist church. I taught Sunday school, lead youth groups, and was somewhat active in civil rights. I loved it, but wanted to do more. I began to believe that I might even be called to the ministry. It never dawned on me, until others mentioned it, that my being a woman might be a problem. In any case, I received little encouragement from family or church. Except for our young assistant pastor, who took me seriously. Shortly before he left us, he asked me to assist him in Communion at our weekly Lenten services — something unheard of in the Methodist church at that time. It was a glorious experience for me.

In college (Allegheny, Meadville, PA.) I helped start a crisis counseling center, worked with the college chaplain, and with a

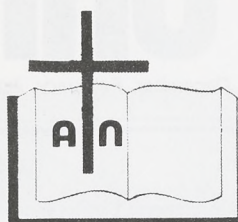
THE REV. ELDER CHARLIE AREHART

The Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart was born in Kansas City, Missouri, October 1946. He was educated in the Kansas City public school system and was graduated from the University of Missouri at Kansas City in 1968 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Education. In 1971, he was graduated with a Master of Divinity degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. He has completed 18 hours toward a M.A. in Recent American and Ancient History at the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

Charlie was reared in the United Methodist Church. At the age of 18 he became a Christian, and a few weeks later began teaching Sunday School and working with the youth at the Blue Ridge Blvd. United Methodist Church, Raytown, Missouri. He was the Youth Director at the Platte Woods United Methodist Church (Kansas City, Missouri) 1968-1969. He pastored the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church during the summer of 1969, and the Mt. Zion and Coal United Methodist Church in central Missouri during the summer of 1970. In May, 1971, Rev. Arehart was appointed by the Bishop to pastor the St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Ray-

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INSIDE IN UNITY

Editorial comment by Richard R. Mickley

In a small midwestern college Father Jim is director of student counseling. He was my classmate in the seminary.

I hadn't seen him for several years. He was most gracious when Miguel and I stopped to pay him a visit after driving a couple of hundred miles out of our way.

I enjoyed chatting about the nine years we had spent together in the Order, praying, studying, working, hiking, talking, talking, and talking.

He was the intellectual. I learned a lot from talking with him all those years. We were very close. He continued to be my spiritual director after he was ordained.

But what have the years done to him? What subtle or sinister forces have cut him off from reality?

I gave him a copy of *Christian Sexuality* and autographed it for him. He said he'd put it in his personal library, but doubted that he would read it because "study of homosexuality" was low on his priority list since "it" was a virtually non-existent "problem" on the 1200 student campus. He hadn't heard of any "cases" for several years.

I couldn't believe my ears, and I told him so. The director of counseling (who had vaguely heard of Dignity, the Catholic organization serving gay men and women) hadn't bumped into any "cases" for several years.

The "cases" probably stayed away in droves when they perceived his naivete or phobia or hangup or whatever it is that is sheltering him, cloth and collar, from reality.

A couple of weeks before, I had met a woman who, indeed, is in touch with reality. One of the highlights of General Conference for me was meeting Patricia Nell

Warren. It wasn't just the thrill of one author meeting another. It was the genuine warmth I felt for this sensitive woman who has so realistically and sensitively captured and immortalized what it means to be gay and to be gay and Christian in her best selling novels, *The Front Runner* and *The Fancy Dancer*.

I like to think of her books as long parables, telling so clearly in the Lord's own literary form, some of the things I am trying to say in *Christian Sexuality*.

Father John McNeill's book, *The Church and The Homosexual*, now available from the Dignity International Office in Boston, will be another valuable asset for gay Christians. See the review in this IN UNITY. Laura Hobson's *Consenting Adult* excellently portrays what it can be like to be the parent of a gay person.

Rev. Perry's autobiography, now out of print, has stood almost alone for several years as the easy to read book to give someone who wants to know how it all comes together.

Thank God that we now have all these tools, and others, including IN UNITY.

I gave my copy of *Consenting Adult* to my mother, a copy of *The Front Runner* to my track star son, and I have great plans for using *The Fancy Dancer*. I have used Rev. Perry's autobiography over and over again.

Can you think of some ways to use these tools? Write and tell me about it. I'll share your testimony with the whole known world.

Father Jim may not read it. Thank God that Dignity is there to cover his default. But somebody will read it, and somebody will come to know God's love is for him or her, and somebody will come to a better life here and There because of it.



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IN UNITY

Published bimonthly in October, December, February, April, June, August

Volume VII Number 1

WINTER '76/'77

Volume VII will designate those issues published between General Conference 1976 and General Conference 1977.

Volume VI was comprised of the January, March, May, and August 1976 issues. The Gay Christian was included, starting with the March issue.

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A NOTE OF EXPLANATION

IN UNITY missed its promised October edition, much to our regret, because of a severe cash flow situation at the Universal Fellowship. Unexpected expenses of the General Conference caused expected revenues to materialize as deficits.

We are sorry for the disappointment to our subscribers and other readers, many of whom have written patient and understanding letters to us. Subscription renewal dates will be advanced accordingly.

IN UNITY—*The Gay Christian* readers who find it in their hearts to help the Universal Fellowship through this time of financial crisis are urged to send a donation, large or small, to the Rev. James Sandmire, Treasurer, Department S, Box 5570, Los Angeles, CA 90055.

The News and Opinion Journal
of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

General Conference VII

Washington D.C.



By Reverend Karen J. Linstrom

There was something *different* about this General Conference.

Even before the first worship service on Tuesday morning, the weekend activities of the Faith, Fellowship and Order Commission had broken radically with the style of Conferences past. By Thursday, it was apparent that the shape, direction and style of Conference activities would never again be the same.

A new way of working together on a Fellowship level emerged, using corporate efforts with other Commissions and Task Forces to meet the theological, educational and social activist needs of the UFMCC.

It was the seventh General Conference. (The number seven symbolizes completeness.)

By the end of the Conference, it was obvious that the Fellowship had gone full circle and was about to embark upon new directions with new ways of approaching old problems. One might ask what was so "different" about *this* Conference, August 10-15, 1976?

On Saturday, August 6, over 20 laity and clergy (with representatives from Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom) began a three day (10 hours a day) "mini-conference" on Faith, Fellowship and Order. The Goal: to answer the six questions charged to the Commission by the 1975 General Conference and to establish congregational and district workshops whereby individual input concerning the theology of MCC could be gathered. For a year, these people held congregational and district workshops, gathering information from participants and brought them to Washington.

The result was a nine-page presentation for study through the coming year on what theology is, what the task of this Fellowship is, what is meant by the word "Community," how we focus the Gospel on this community and the unique emphasis of the Christian ministry of the UFMCC. (The entire reprint is published in *the Gay Christian* in this issue and IN UNITY.) *For the first time in Church History, the laity, not the "theologian," formed the theology of a*

Christian body. This history-making event will affect not only MCC but will have ramifications for all other members of the Christian Community.

By the first worship service on Tuesday morning, the meaning of the UNIVERSAL Fellowship of MCC exploded upon the consciousness of those present. There, bringing into focus the vision of one man eight years ago, were representatives from Australia (19 brothers and sisters!), Canada, the United Kingdom and Nigeria. Brothers and sisters from outside the United States sang, preached and shared the "Good News" giving the American story a revival and calling all of us to the true meaning of God's universal Love, which knows and respects no ethnic, or national boundaries. Particularly moving was the greeting to the General Conference from the 64 brothers and sisters of the Zaria, Nigeria congregation, via tape, and presented by the Reverend Sylvanus Maduka. (For those of you that scoff at the possibility that love can flow from a strand of 3-M recording tape, know that you

stand corrected!)

In the following two days, there seemed to be an endless round of workshops: Christian Education; Faith, Fellowship and Order; Innovative ministries, Christian Social Action; the Task Forces on Racism, Women and Men; Religious Orders and Liturgy, just to name a few. After a long day, there ensued a long night, as many of the Commissions and Task Forces held meetings after the evening service in an attempt to get as much input as possible from the people present. (For those who think General Conference is nothing more than a Fellowship party, you are cordially invited to Denver next year. Standard equipment includes track shoes, a ream of paper, sharpened pencils, and at least a mythical supply of "NO-DOZ"!)

From three days of Business meetings, there emerged a discerning, voting body of laity and clergy. Reports from the Commissions and Task Forces were scrutinized and questioned from every aspect, including their effect upon the congregations the voting members represented. Some were unanimously approved. Others were deferred back to committee for further study and preparation.

What came out of those business sessions was a number of animated commissions, committees and Task Forces — some alive with full Conference approval for the coming year's ventures, others challenged to do further study and report to the next General Conference. Each body faced a year's work with a full complement of people dedicated and refreshed to continue projects in the making, and to study new directions mandated by the General Conference.

For the first time, the inter-relatedness of the Fellowship Commissions was realized, as the actions of the FFO Commission provided material for the Christian Education Commission to work on, as well as the Board of Publications. As we continue to grow, the effectiveness of our Commissions will become more

apparent.

And yet, as the vision that brought us together became more focused, for some the awful awareness of our humanity became painfully apparent. The dastardly weapon: LANGUAGE!

The recommendations from the Task Force on Racism were deferred back to committee for further study. . .

and a Spanish speaking brother tearfully wonders if anyone knows how that hurt.

The American Bicentennial left those brothers and sisters from outside the United States wondering at times if there was any other place on earth besides America.

The use of Sexist language left some sisters wondering if they were included.

The use of the word "Gay" brought one non-gay member to tears, wondering if she had the right to be there with everyone else.

A fast-growing body such as the UFMCC feels growing pains far more acutely than we realize. Once we have made the mistake, however, we try to heal our language, heal ourselves and heal those who have been wounded. (Teach us, dear Lord, to become as sensitive to the needs of those around us as You are.)

The week of FIRST'S continued:

A new meaning for some was given to the word "Liturgy." On Saturday, the General Con-

ference experienced its first Black Liturgy. Not only beautifully moving, it taught another lesson in the varied ways in which the worship of God can be appreciated and cherished.

Then tragedy struck. The General Conference was informed that the Riverside Church in California had burned to the ground. The new pastor rushed to the airport to return to her congregation. The former pastor and her spouse, as well as many others in that hall, burst into tears, and the loss was shared in tears and prayers of thanksgiving that no one was hurt. Then, one by one, pastors, members, and representatives of organizations rose to pledge \$20.00, \$50.00, \$100.00 to the Riverside congregation to help them rebuild. At last count, over \$3,000.00 was pledged, with more to come. The determination to rebuild with Riverside spread to the Conference proceedings, and the Business meeting was finished on time, notwithstanding a bomb threat that cut two hours off the scheduled meeting time. Just in time for yet another "first."

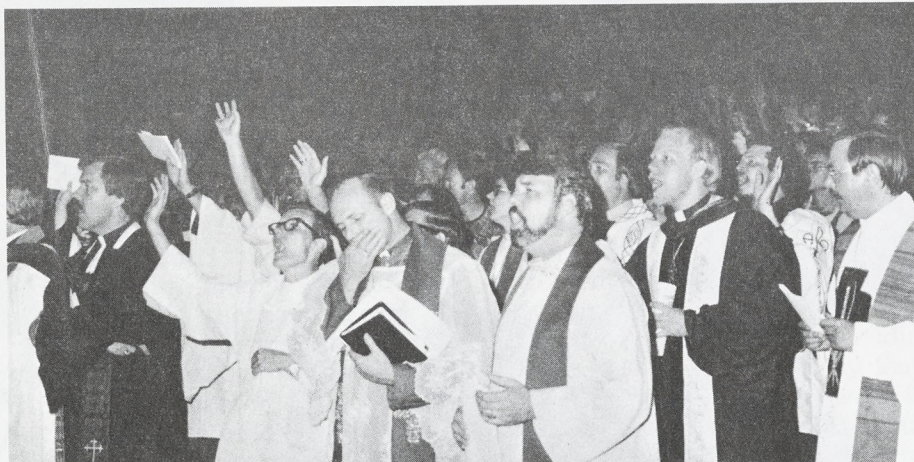
At 10:30 p.m. on Friday over a thousand sisters and brothers gathered at the "Reflecting Pool" separating the Washington and Lincoln Monuments. With prayer and song, we honored those who died in the New Orleans fire, and those saints who had died in God's service and remembered those exterminated by the Nazis. Singing



the "Alleluia," a column six-people wide began a slow walk to the top of the Lincoln Monument. The first to reach the summit turned around and were overwhelmed by the sight: the column was stretched across a quarter mile; the end standing motionless at the Reflecting Pool, candles illuminating the darkness. When

people spoke and one's heart was lifted and encouraged by the many areas of involvement and strength we as Christians have in this secular world.

The final service . . . the end of General Conference 1976. The Rev. Elder Troy Perry began to speak. The usually loudly applauding crowd grew silent and atten-



all were gathered at the summit, Rev. Perry offered a prayer of hope and thanksgiving followed by "We Shall Overcome." The words echoed from within, and somehow, the face of Lincoln looking down upon this, one of the last peoples to be "freed from slavery" made the hopes of each person gathered burn brighter and the determination stronger.

Sunday morning arrived . . . the doors of the Warner Theatre opened, and the first service began. First the procession of the ministers . . . followed by the Rite of Ordination for four ministers (The Reverends C. Shawn Farrell, Jim Harris, Sylvanus Maduka and Ron Anderson. Other ministers, approved for Ordination chose to share this event with their congregations.) Finally, the installation of our two new Elders: The Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (Detroit) and the Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart (Denver).

The emotion of that service had barely ebbed when we gathered at Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, for a rally with pro-E.R.A. forces. Many

tive as Troy preached.

As he continued, it became apparent that God's prophet was speaking, and prophesying and proclaiming that liberation was at hand . . . not completed, but at hand.

Tired, but on a spiritual "high," the participants in the Seventh Annual General Conference were dismissed in peace, with prayers for safe journeys home, and many tearful good-byes . . . until next year.

We would pray that General Conference 1977 finds our Fellowship even more mature in its discipleship, meeting the needs of its people more fully, and hopefully, receiving a double blessing at the Eighth General Conference in the Mile High City. ■



Reflections of a Host Pastor

Having been the host pastor of the 7th Annual General Conference, which was held in Washington, D.C. from August 10-15, 1976, I would like to offer a few brief reflections about having been such a host pastor.

My first reflection is that like so many Christmases, it was over before it had begun. The Washington Church had worked so hard for so long to make conference really work.

I guess it all began even before I assumed the pastorate in September of 1975. When I arrived in Washington some very key persons were very involved in working on preparations for Affirmation '76. Kerry Brown, who proved to be such a tireless worker throughout the preparation and execution of conference, had already negotiated with the Ambassador Hotel, and therefore the accommodations for conference were firmed up. Kerry was the chairperson of our conference preparations for the first half of that "conference" year. She continued in January and throughout conference as our liaison to the Hotel.

From September through conference, I was amazed and so thrilled by the participation and hard work expressed by almost everyone in MCC-DC during 1975-76. In January, Adam DeBaugh and Michelle Rickard took over as chairpersons of General Conference. Michelle and Adam, with the help of Rev. Roy Birchard (who represented the Fellowship through the Washington Field Office) and myself (representing MCC-DC), did a really good job.

We had all worked so hard and then it was all over very quickly. I'm not going to try to mention everyone who helped and worked so hard. I do know that MCC-DCers were helped by many

people from other churches. A special thanks goes to MCC-Baltimore for their help with registration, and to MCC-King of Peace, St. Petersburg, Florida, for their help in the kitchen. Those who read this article and were at conference know how hard everyone worked, and to such hard workers we are very grateful.

My second reflection is that while Washington, D.C. Conference was almost over before it started, it was a very spiritual experience. General Conferences are always a spiritual uplift for me. It's almost like I get my "batteries" recharged once a year. This year was no exception. The preaching and worship services were excellent and very invigorating. The Friday evening memorial service at the Lincoln Memorial, Patricia Neil Warren's testimony, Lafayette Square, and even the impromptu worship services in the hotel chapel were all so rewarding.

I've met so many new friends and renewed friendships with those I've known before. I was most impressed with how our church is coming of age. The workshops were taken seriously and produced material that will need continued work and implementation during the next year. I believe Faith, Fellowship and Order's model of holding a three-day workshop before the beginning of conference will be something required of other commissions and task forces in the church. I was particularly impressed by the papers and reports from the various task forces of the Commission on Christian Social Action, the theological questions and answers from the Commission on Faith, Fellowship and Order, and the most comprehensive financial report this denomination has ever issued. I feel confident that God will continue to bless the efforts of UFMCC as begun in this 7th General Conference throughout the coming year.

Real personal highlights of the week were the ministers' dinner and the spaghetti dinner. Both were opportunities to fellowship with fellow ministers and lay persons. I hope similar opportunities will be provided in Denver.



Rev. Jack Isbell with Rev. Elder Freda Smith

A final reflection, and I'm sure there are many more, is that MCC-DC was indeed blessed to have hosted such a conference. We have a unique ecumenical witness in the Washington Church, since we are able to share ministry with our host congregation, the First Congregational United Church of Christ. First Church is so helpful to our congregation anyway, and was most gracious in permitting the use of their building for the meeting of a General Conference. Thank you, First Church, for all your help. The witness of the United Church of Christ is enhanced by your openness. We are

not only blessed by sharing ministry, we are blessed that so many MCC'ers from all over the world have visited our church.

Our congregation is already receiving much growth from the total experience of hosting a general conference. Thank you, International Fellowship. Thank you, Washington, D.C., for receiving my sisters and brothers so well and thank you to all of you who participated in this conference and made it such a success. I just can't say thank you enough for such a blessing.

— The Rev. Jack Isbell
Senior Pastor, MCC-DC

A TESTIMONY

"I came to MCC Tampa almost five years ago. Since then I've missed very few services or anything MCC has to offer. The services mean a lot to me and Rev. Hose's sermons are great. To be with one's own kind and to help others find happiness as homosexuals is satisfying to me. My love, Hanna, feels the same and has been coming for nearly four years to services with me."

Mildred Girton
MCC Tampa
October 1976

With God's Help, YES!

By Joe Houle

Behind us stands the Washington Monument, as smooth, fragile and egg-shell white as the moon suspended in the blue sky above it. The city's lights transform the sky into a luminous membrane just barely hiding it seems, a flurry of activity behind the shifting patterns of light. There is something in the set and the lighting which conjures up dreams of other planets and future times, or perhaps a hazy memory of a Classical Golden Age of Peace. But no, I change my stance and the gravel crunches. I look down and see randomly scattered cigarette butts. We look out across the pool between us and the Washington Monument and the name of Martin Luther King spreads through the crowd as nimbly as a butterfly.

Quietly the crowd gathers. Is anyone at all talking tonight? I hear only the crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch of gravel as we arrive and shuffle aimlessly. The anxious anticipation before an important news release. The hush before the start of a major race.

The memorial service began so quietly, grew so naturally out of this time and this place that I don't recall how and when it started. In my mind I am suddenly facing the Lincoln Memorial. A candle, lit, has found its way into my hand. Troy Perry is weeping before us. "Forgive me if I cry," he says, "but I am so lonely tonight for my brothers and sisters . . ." There is no crunching of gravel now, only the sound of candles' flames assaulted by the wind.

In a column six people wide we begin our ascent to the Lincoln Memorial, singing "Alleluia" to a melody of Gregorian chant simplicity. It is all oneiric for me,

effortless and almost eternal, as if each step leaves me exactly where I was although something intangible inside and around me is changing. But I do reach the top of the stairs. I turn to see the column of people, my people, my family, and I hear the strong open-throated song of a nation united and proud to sing and stand together. An image of Moses leading his people out of captivity leaps into my mind and I am swept by a sense of how the Israelites must have felt as Moses led them through the waters of the Red Sea. The sense of pride and humility, strength and fragility, unity and uniqueness, joy and wonder. Somehow, led by Troy Perry, we are all repeating a prayer to God. I see Troy at the top of the stairs, his eyes closed and his clenched fists raised to the sky. His voice is filled with anger, hurt, desire and determination. I join myself, my

little light, to the power this man has before our God, and an overwhelming sense of being possessed and swept along by something much, much bigger than I seizes me. This power sinks deeper and deeper into me as I repeat our prayer. My voice gets louder and louder, angrier and angrier, and I am shouting, SHOUTING at the top of my voice that I will never again allow myself to be oppressed, that I will never again become the fodder of any people or nation, that I will never again apologize for my calling from God. In Jesus' name we shout our claim to liberation.

The echo! Oh, the echo! A thousand voices claiming freedom for all people echo in the vaults of the Lincoln Memorial for several seconds, hover for a moment over us and rise to the stars.

On the steps I am shaking, shaking, shaking, and I feel that at any moment I am going to explode into a million broken pieces. Deep inside me something snaps, a forgotten gear shifts and a flood of tears pours out over my cheeks and falls onto the steps of the Lincoln Memorial . . .

My brothers and sisters, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, our Lord, proclaiming liberation in the land for *all* people, reached into my heart and broke the bonds of fear and guilt. Will I have the strength to claim the libera-



— photo by Miguel Llamas Avila

tion as totally as it has been granted? With God's help, YES! For the Lord has lit my lamp; am I to put it under a basket? He has given flavor to my life; am I to pretend that the salt of my life has no taste? He has brought joy and hope into my life; am I to walk about downcast and sullen? He has placed in my trust His message of hope and salvation; am I to bury that message "safely" in the ground? Of course not!

At Affirmation '76 I learned a new hymn which goes: "There's a new name written down in heaven, and It's mine, oh yes, it's mine!" Join with me, then, in praising God, our liberator, our Hope and our Salvation. ■

Reprinted in full from NEW WINE, MCC Pittsburgh, Sept. 1976.

WORDS FAIL

By Reid Christensen

I would like to be able to sit down and tell everyone who was unable to attend General Conference in Washington, DC just how great it was.

I could tell you about all the beautiful people who stood at the podium throughout the week — those people who so aptly lead MCC'ers in worship, each in his or her own unique way. I could tell you about each service's special music — about how blessed the fellowship is with musical talent. I could relate to you special events that were so meaningful to me — the special panel discussion from the Commission on Christian Social Action, the testimony from Patricia Nell Warren, and even the two pickets outside the church.

And my eyes would probably get a little misty and my voice would waver as I described the candlelight memorial service at the Lincoln Memorial. I was able

PROCLAIM LIBERATION IN THE LAND

By The Rev. Kenneth T. Martin

As we call our sisters and brothers back to a fidelity to the church, we must remember that fidelity to the church depends upon the church's fidelity to the gospel of liberation for and identification with the outcast.

Only when we have made that identification will we cease meeding the approval of a religious establishment which professes freedom, acceptance and servanthood but prefers privilege, social sanction and silence; which preaches the virtue of honesty but accepts us only as long as we lie, and then condemns us when we tell the truth about ourselves.

As we make our identification with the Christ who suffered and died outside the gates of propriety and social acceptability, we shall observe that prophetic leadership has given way to an uncritical alliance with the existing order, the legacy of Amos has been bartered away for an unholy and dishonorable peace with the *status quo* and the cross of abandonment and rejection has been replaced with the cross of parochial concern.

Then we shall realize there is no condemnation in their disapproval of us. In fact, their disapproval may be the greatest compliment we can be given. Therefore, it must be to this truth with which the church has been invested: the "dangerous remembrance" of the death of Christ outside the gates, that we turn.

It will be in the church, which has consistently denied the liberating aspects of this revelation, that we defend it most boldly.

And, it will be to every woman and man who will hear and believe that we shall proclaim the result that life need not be a lonely and relentless crucible but can, in truth, be a positive and joyous discipleship to Jesus, the Christ, in whom we have seen God.

to glance back from my place up front and see the long trail of people slowly climbing the steps, softly lighted by candles. I could hear our voices — a thousand strong — lift up in song and prayer. And as we reaffirmed our conviction and faith our many voices echoed again and again throughout the Memorial Building.

Unfortunately, no matter what I said, no matter how long I talked, I could never convey to you the spiritual and emotional uplift I felt that week. I just know I glowed with the Christian love that filled my heart by the end of conference.

And I know that even when I settle back down to earth — the spiritual effect that conference has had on my life will still be there. I shall never forget the sound of my brothers and sisters voices joined in song or the joy I felt as we all gathered together to worship.

Next year General Conference will be in Denver, Colorado. Please — start saving your pennies, start planning your time so that you can attend. It's a spiritual experience you will never forget. ■



Sister Joe Crisco sings "Ten Thousand Angels" at General Conference worship service.

— photo by Bill Thom

(Reid Christensen is Worship Coordinator at MCC Illiano in Quincy, IL and Keokuk, IA.)

1976 Ordination and Licensure

The solemn service of ordination is traditionally celebrated at the high liturgical worship service on Sunday morning, culminating the week-long, spirit filled worship services of General Conference.

Ordained at the General Conference ordination service in Washington, DC were The Reverends Ron Anderson, Shawn Farrell, James Harris, Sylvanus Maduka, Kenneth Martin.

The Reverends Arthur Cazeault and Jim Dykes chose to be ordained in Atlanta, GA. The Rev. Stan Harris was ordained in Long Beach, CA, the Rev. Larry Uhrig in Washington, DC, and The Rev.

Gary Wilson in Anchorage, AK.

After General Conference several congregations held special services of ordination and "Celebration of Ministry" for ministers approved for ordination and newly licensed ministers.

MCC-DC celebrated the ordination of the Rev. Larry Uhrig, and the licensing of Rev. Darryl Etzler and Rev. Louise Leopold.

The Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, in one of her first official acts as an Elder of the Fellowship, presided at the meaningful ceremony. The Rev. Michael England preached.

In MCC Los Angeles, in separate ceremonies, newly licensed ministers were set aside by the Rev. Elder James Sandmire. The Rev. Brenda Hunt and the Rev. Al DeLabio were recognized as professional ministers and received the prayers of the pastor and congregation.

At MCC of the Valley in North Hollywood, CA, the Rev. James Glycer, for 25 years an ordained minister and pastor in the Presbyterian Church, was ordained to the lifelong ordained ministry of MCC

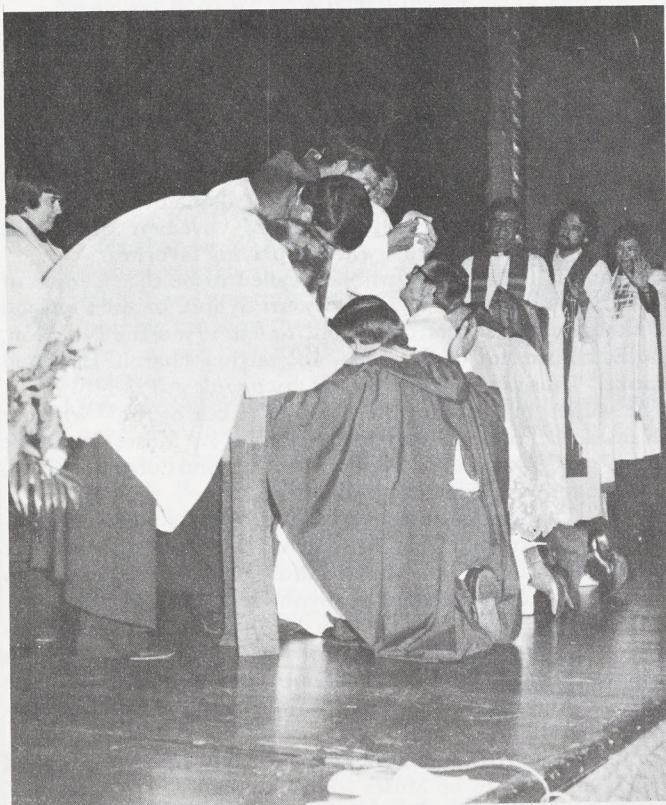
by the Rev. James Sandmire, presiding, along with the Rev. Robert Cunningham and the Reverends Laurence Bernier, and Paul Breton. The Rev. Randy Cypher preached to the full "house of the Lord," including two of Rev. Glycer's six natural children and his life-partner Albert Williams. Other ministers participating in the ceremony included The Rev. Jeff Pulling and the Rev. Richard Mickley.

As a result of the action of the Ministerial Credentials Committee and the General Conference, the total number of professional ministers of the Fellowship now stands at 130, including 50 ordained ministers and eighty professional licensed ministers.

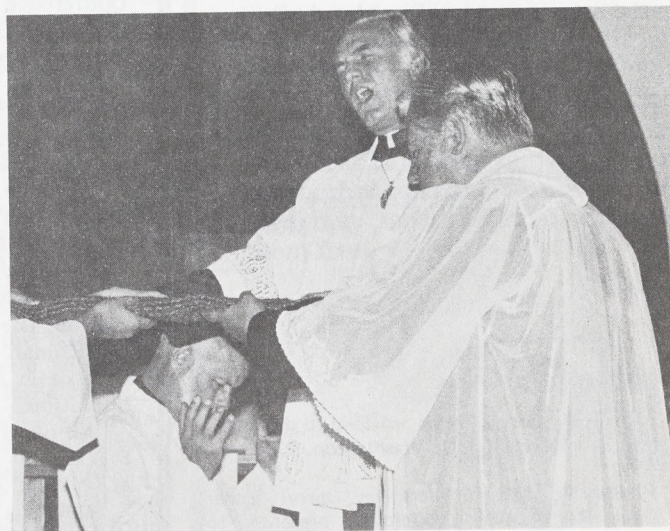
The thirty newly licensed ministers are:

Rev. John H. Ayres
Rev. James A. Beers
Rev. Valerie A. Bouchard
Rev. Margaret H. Breckenridge
Rev. Robert C. Darst
Rev. Al DeLabio
Rev. Timothy A. Ehmke
Rev. Arthur L. Fleschner
Rev. Deborah M. Gendron
Rev. Theodore W. Hall
Rev. Arthur Frank Murr
Rev. Michael S. Nordstrom
Rev. Carolyn Dianne Pruitt)
Rev. Rob Shivers
Rev. Jerry Sloan
Rev. Eileen Steichen
Rev. Jane Taylor
Rev. Claudia L. Vierra
Rev. Ellen J. Watson
Rev. Marshall C. Williams

Rev. Bruce A. Hill
Rev. Edward T. Hougren
Rev. Brenda J. Hunt
Rev. Delores Jackson
Rev. Jim D. Jaynes
Rev. Louise M. Leopold
Rev. Gilbert H. Lincoln
Rev. Karen J. Linstrom
Rev. George S. McDermott
Rev. Rhea Y. Miller



The Reverends Ron Anderson, C. Shawn Farrell, James Harris, Sylvanus Maduka and Kenneth Martin are ordained by the Elders to the ministry.
— photo by Bill Thom



The Rev. James Glycer is ordained to the ministry in a service at MCC in the Valley.
— photo by Peter, photographer

Celebration of the Ministry

On Sunday August 22, the congregation of MCC-DC celebrated an affirmation of the ministry and the ordination to the ministry of the Rev. Larry J. Uhrig. The celebration of the ministry was intended to recognize and affirm the ministry of the Rev. Darryl Etzler and the Rev. Louise Leopold upon the occasion of their licensing to the ministry of the UFMCC.

The congregation of MCC-DC, feeling that such an occasion in the life of a person should be corporately celebrated and affirmed, chose to express this intention in a particular worship experience.

I think it is important in the life of a congregation to recognize that event in the life of a person which brings them to the point of accepting the call to ministry, the responsibility for ministry, and choosing of service to a specific community.

As for my own experience of the event of my ordination, it is very difficult to express in words the meaning of so awesome an occasion, the depth of awareness of a new word to a new community, and the blessing and joy of being chosen to continue the witness of faith.

In this entire event, the congregation experienced a new awareness of the nature of ministry, its breadth and depth, the compelling quality of God's calling to all persons, and the corporate joy found in sharing so intimately in the lives of our sisters and brothers.

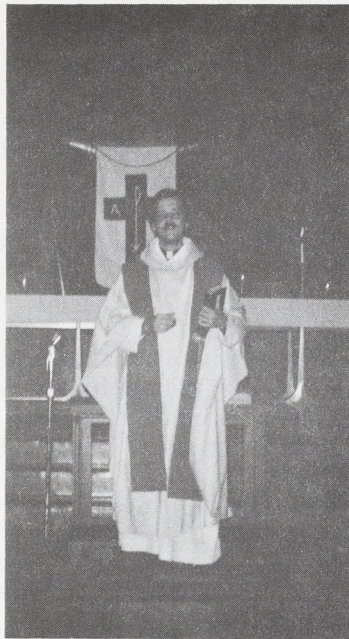
To all the Fellowship we are indebted, for it is in the corporate sharing of the meaning of our ministry that individuals are able to define and experience a personal ministry which is uniquely theirs.

— The Rev. Larry J. Uhrig
MCC-DC

Photos

The Rev. Larry Uhrig is ordained to the ministry in a service at MCC Washington, D.C.

Newly licensed ministers Rev. Darryl Etzler and Rev. Louise Leopold are presented to MCC Washington, D.C. congregation.



PROCLAIM LIBERATION IN THE LAND

GENERAL CONFERENCE SERMON (Friday, August 13, 1976)

Delivered by Rev. C. Shawn Farrell, Assistant Pastor, MCC-Dallas, Texas

Text: John 3:8

We look at the agony of the 20th century world, the discrimination, the prejudice, the brutality; and find that the old cliches, the old dogmas are no longer enough. We hunger for a "present" reality and ask out of our hunger, "Where in such a world as this is God?"

We begin where we are today. God is here with us, not "up there" or "out there," but in the unfolding events of our time — the 20th century. God does not force events to happen. God inspires some of them, judges all of them, and shares in them with all of us.

This is not a new theology. It is at the heart of the biblical revelation. It is the essence of the Incarnation.

The God of Moses is a God of current events. God manifested the divine in Jesus Christ, an event that has continued to touch all of humanity at all levels of life and endeavor. The God of Moses is a God of covenant who binds country and city dwellers — people to people without playing favorites.

Moses can be the example for all of us who are called to be the "People of God." It was no doddering old bishop, or the Missouri Synod, or the Portland Conference of the United Methodist Church he confronted. It was the Pentagon, the White House, the Establishment of his day — the mighty Pharaoh. He stood before Pharaoh and spoke "Thus sayeth the Lord, *let my people go!*"

Each of us must be willing to confront the Pharaohs of our Egypt — whether it be New Jersey, Kansas, Colorado, Texas or California. As Moses, we must say "You let my people go!" And if they will not, then we must organize them, we must march with them and lead them out of bondage.

We must, in the process, understand that until we are willing to be free ourselves, with all the responsibility that goes with it; until we are willing to set each other free — the proclamation of liberation to those outside this Fellowship is hypocrisy — for we cannot declare freedom to anyone if we are not free.

It is easy to see God at work looking back in history. Moses opposed his Pharaoh, Dietrich Bonhoeffer opposed his Adolph Hitler. It is easy to see God in the Roman arenas where Christians died for their faith, but we need to see the Creator in our century, in the relief of poverty — in black liberation, in gay liberation — in HUMAN liberation.

All of us come from different denominational persuasions, but we are called *together* as the "People of God" to be Moses for all humanity. **THOUGH WE MAY NOT ALL THINK ALIKE, MAY WE NOT ALL LOVE ALIKE?**

Where is God? God is present wherever human beings protect freedom and the tools of freedom; wherever love and justice are structured into the social process; wherever the responsibility of freedom is assumed; and wherever the values of Christian faith are placed above all other loyalties of life.

PROCLAIM LIBERATION IN THE LAND

by The Rev. Stan J. Harris

Zeph. 3: 19-20. "I have taken away your misfortune, no longer need you bear the disgrace of it. I am taking action here and now against your oppressions. When that time comes I will rescue the lame, and bring back those that were chased away, and I will win them praise and renown when I restore their fortunes.

When that time comes, I will be your buide, when that time comes, I will gather you in; I will give you praise and renown among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very own eyes, thus says the Lord."

This text originally applied to the children of Israel in regard to the ending of the Babylonian captivity; yet we believe that the scriptures are divinely inspired and are timeless in their application, and apply equally as true for our age as they did in ages past.

Have we, as gay people been oppressed, have we not lost our 'fortunes'? Not in silver and gold, but in self-respect and human dignity? Who else has been 'chased away' from our churches through bigotry, intolerance and hatred?

How often have we been classed as 'lame' (i.e. sick)?

Yet, the promise in the scripture is for 'restoration' and restitution, and we, sisters and brothers are not only living to witness the fulfillment of this promise, but, praise God, we are actually *part* of it.

Rev. Perry tells us "Liberation begins up here, in the mind." How true that is: and, I tell you, the only way you get 'up here' working properly is through Jesus Christ. No organization, rallies, protests or sit-ins can liberate us! Christ is our true liberator. No longer are we bound to evil or degradation or despair. We have been delivered through the saving blood of Christ Jesus. No longer do we pick up a sister or brother and use their body for sexual pleasure then cast them aside having fulfilled our selfish desires. No longer are we bound by hopelessness that can only be removed through suicide. No longer need we wallow in filth and self-hatred for Jesus is Lord, and by his death he conquered sin, by His resurrection He has given new life, liberation to all of us if only we open our hearts to receive it.

No longer need we be affected by the scorn and condemnation hurled upon us by the ignorant because we love one another, "For the Lord is God, it is He that has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture." Ps. 100).

You think MCC is large, but I tell you that there is much, much more to be done: the Lord gave Rev. Perry a seed, you became the pot and the soil to receive that seed. Only the Holy Spirit can provide the necessary water to nourish the seed. If we put up 'umbrellas' of fear and doubt over our 'pot' the 'water of the Spirit' cannot reach, and the seed will die.

So far that 'seed' has become a small bush; we are in a forest of 'tall trees,' (established churches) many of which are trying to block off our light and rain, but if we are truly converted, truly loving and faithful to Christ Jesus, then nothing can stop the Holy Spirit from swiftly descending upon us, snapping off a few of the tall trees' branches in order for us to receive life-giving light and moisture.

After our 'bush' becomes a 'tree,' we cannot rest, even then. For flowers are the next addition: even though the flowering tree shelters all manner of creatures, the tree has yet to bear fruit.

However, if you then think you've made it, think again, for only *some* fruit is eaten, the rest must fall to earth, die, then sprout forth as *new* plants which in turn must be cared for as was the first . . . we ourselves are still a small bush, and only in Christ shall we achieve any measure of development.

But be of good cheer, the Lord has promised us hope, and God's promises do not fail. We must do our bit in cooperation, and we will only find strength in Christ.

We cannot liberate ourselves: it has been tried before. Witness the 'liberation' groups that have risen then collapsed around us in utter confusion, while we, with Christ leading us are still growing, still working, still praising. Hallelujah.

It's happening here in the United States and it's happening back home (Australia). Of course we have difficulties, personality clashes. Of course we disagree sometimes, *but* with Christ as our liberator we still march forward. Let us, however, remember that liberation is not an exclusive thing: the Lord has also promised RESTORATION, so let's start moving outward and joyfully eat from the table that the Lord has prepared for us, and for all who believe on His/Her name. Amen!!

Thoughts from London

By The Rev. Ken Taylor

As Eddie and I walked through the streets of Washington, DC, and gazed up at the tall Government buildings that make up the lovely capital city of the United States of America, we came across time and time again, great ideals carved in the stonework — words which would make any Christian say, "Praise the Lord!" Alas, we recognized that these ideals were only carved in stone, and unless and until they are carved in the hearts of men and women, they will effect nothing.

This is not a personal criticism of the United States of America. If anything, it is a challenge to all people of all nationalities to recognize the dignity which God has given to the human race. MCC's boast is that it is the Church where 'God does not discriminate.' That is our ideal, but it must be carved in our hearts in order for it to be true.

The theme of UFMCC General Conference this year was based on words taken from Leviticus 25:10. They are inscribed on the most revered symbol of American Independence, the "Liberty Bell" at Philadelphia. The words are these: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land . . ." Significantly, the "Liberty Bell" with its inscribed message was cast in London. Let us re-cast this same message in our hearts that men and women in this land may see the Christ who sets them free.





The Rev. Robert Sirico addresses "Affirmation '76" gathering in Lafayette Park.
— photo by Bill Thom

We, The Gay People

by R. Adam DeBaugh

(This will be an on-going column for IN UNITY, by R. Adam DeBaugh, the Fellowship's Chairperson of the Commission on Christian Social Action. In it Adam hopes to provide some insights on what is happening around the Fellowship in terms of Christian Social Action and resources that are already available or are being developed for the use of people in UFMCC congregations. Adam welcomes comments and questions and information about resources, and can be reached at the Fellowship's Washington Field Office, Suite 210, 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.)

The process of recovering from the incredible excitement of General Conference is about over for me. Looking back on a whirlwind of activity, love and joy, a few things stand out for me as being significant. Most notable were the Memorial Service at the Lincoln Memorial on Friday night and Sunday afternoon's "Affirmation '76" in Lafayette Park.

By now, you have all heard about the 1,000 sisters and brothers who gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in one of those rare and magnificent nights in

Washington when the air is clear and the white marble and granite monuments stand out with crystal clarity against a velvet sky.

As I climbed toward the entrance of the Lincoln Memorial, with the words of the Elders still in my ears about the people they wished to remember and memorialize on this solemn night, and the voices of 1,000 sisters and brothers all around me singing that haunting refrain "alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia," I remembered. I remembered other candles and other marches. I remembered other dead, being memorialized for having been killed on the other side of the world by anonymous American bombers. I remembered other dead, being memorialized for having been killed because they were black. I remembered other dead, unnamed martyrs in a history of senseless violence and oppression.

It is important, I believe, to understand that we are in the mainstream of Christian thought, teaching and action when we seek to do "Christian Social Action." The churches were brought into social action most recently by the sisters and brothers in Black churches who showed us the way to implement Jesus' teachings so

as to do justice for racial minorities. The work went on as church leaders began to protest a war they considered wrong and wasteful. The concerns of women became important in many churches during this decade as women reached out for the ministry of the Gospel in the Episcopal church and moved forward into positions of leadership and strength all over.

And now gay people are beginning to stand up and claim their place in the world. We begin by remembering. We remember our dead, our martyrs, our saints: the victims of the New Orleans fire, the suicides, the lonely, those deserted by their family and friends, the jobless and homeless, those who have given up hope. We remember, and that is the first step. But the second step is to do Christian social action and to reach out and help, protect, love and lift up those whom we can reach.

Metropolitan Community Church is called to be a hand reaching out to the lonely and afraid. We are called, as our sister, the Rev. C. Shawn Farrell, said in a wonderful sermon, to be Moses, leading our people out of bondage.

We are not called to add bonds

to the ones already imposed by society on our people. We are called to "let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke," (Isaiah 58:6). That is Christian Social Action.

The ones I remembered most in that memorial service at the sparkling white Lincoln Memorial on that crystalline Washington night, were the unknown dead. Those people who have lived and died, being gay deep in their souls, but afraid and unable to acknowledge it, and who died without anybody ever knowing. Who are they? They are a major part of our history, yet they are gone and we will never know them. They still exist today, however, people who are afraid to celebrate their God-given and God-blessed sexuality. Perhaps one of our jobs is to help them, our unknown sisters and brothers, to walk with us in the sunshine of love.

We were also in the great tradition of Christian social action as we gathered in Lafayette Park, where so many demonstrations and protests and assemblies had been before us, to affirm our right to be whom God made us. We shouted, sang, listened, and looked around at our brave band of people.

We knew the risks. But didn't we have to take those risks? Didn't we have to expose our lives and our love in order to give strength to others and to each other? And wasn't God working even then, even there?

One of my dear friends, a wonderful brother, took that risk and lost something. One of his bosses happened to be in Washington on holiday, happened to be near the White House, and happened to see him in Lafayette Park that bright, hot Sunday afternoon. That person returned and caused our brother to be fired from his job. It is hard, sometimes, to see what God has in mind when such things happen. It is hard to accept this as God's will. Yet if anything, such incidents can spur us on to work harder and with increased zeal to proclaim and bring liberation in the land.

Why were the memorial service at the Lincoln Memorial and the affirmation in Lafayette Park so

significant to me? I guess because they involve what I feel are key ingredients of Christian Social Action: taking risks, crying out for justice, solidarity and love, and community effort.

Black liberation fighters in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa cried "A luta continua!" "The struggle continues," as indeed it does for us as well. Regardless of the part of the struggle you embrace as your own, our collective struggle does continue, and it will continue until we are all free.

RESOURCES

The Commission on Christian Social Action hopes to produce a "Workbook on Christian Social Action for 1976-1977" which will reprint all social action reports and resolutions passed by General Conference and which will provide explanations of each resolution, suggestions and recommendations for local churches which want to start implementing the resolutions, resources and bibliographies.

This workbook should be available soon and will cost a small sum of money to cover printing

and mailing costs (the Commission on Christian Social Action has no budget for this year). The workbook will be available from the Washington Office.

The Commission's Task Force on Women recommends "Desexing your Local Hymnal, a definitive guide to over 700 hymns" by Marjorie Ragona and Jennie Bull. This handbook has information about how to go about ridding many old familiar hymns of sexist and racist language. It is available for 50c from the Washington Office or the Universal Fellowship Press in Los Angeles.

Letters have been sent to pastors and worship coordinators of all MCC congregations asking if they would name a Christian Social Action chairperson for the local church. These names should be sent to Adam DeBaugh at the Washington Office.

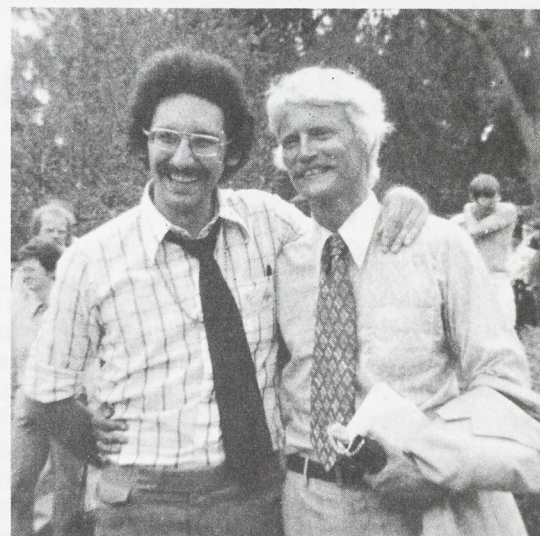
"Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth." Zephaniah 3:19. ■

Adam DeBaugh, Christian Social Action Chairperson, embraces Dr. Bruce Voeller, Executive Director of the National Gay Task Force.

— photo by Bill Thom

Rev. Perry moderates special panel discussion on social action as part of Wednesday Conference activities.

— photo by Bill Thom



Fellowship, Faith & Order Theology Report

(In *THE GAY CHRISTIAN* in this issue of *IN UNITY*, the historic interim report of the Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission (FFO) is printed in full. The twenty-some members of the Commission met with its chairperson, The Rev. Howard Wells, M. Div., in Washington for three hard-working days prior to the opening of the General Conference. The reasons for calling this document "historic" are well verbalized in the following article by a writer in the St. Louis MCC Newsletter.)

Doctrine! The mere mention of the word conjures up images of "papal bulls" and indisputable, dogmatic tenets of the church!

Once again, however, MCC is responsible for a genuine re-definition of terms.

For the very first time, a church set out to develop a "people's theology," a true reflection of the beliefs and needs of the thousands of Christian men and women who make up the Fellowship.

The answers to the six questions are the direct result of combining the materials gathered from FFO workshops in every district in the Fellowship, from lay people and ministers.

The FFO Commission did not submit its findings as "The Word." The report is offered to the church for careful scrutiny and prayerful concern.

We, as members of MCC have had a unique opportunity to be a part of this interim report. We now face the responsibility of making it a viable instrument of our Christian mission. We can do this by studying the interim report and making our opinions known on the local level.

The Commission will continue to rework and revise the report over the next year on the basis of your suggestions.

From *The New Light*
MCC St. Louis, September 1976.

Destiny... Here We

When I was asked to write an article for this issue of *IN UNITY*, several subjects came to mind about which I could write; however, my thoughts kept returning to the idea of presenting my personal views of the "state of the Fellowship."

Having been an Elder for the past three years, I have had opportunity to observe a broader experience in the activities of the Fellowship. There are some significant points that I feel members of this special body of Christ must address for future growth.

For those who will feel that I have concentrated only on the

Interview With A Third World Pastor

By George W. Bright III

(Rev. Sylvanus Maduka, pastor of MCC Zaria in Nigeria, is MCC's first ordained black minister. The Fellowship and generous MCC members made it possible for this man — who walks ten miles each day to and from his leaky-roofed church in mid Africa — to attend the General Conference in Washington and tour some of the MCC cities of America.

I asked George Bright of MCC St. Louis, an editorial advisor for *IN UNITY*, to interview Rev. Maduka and get his impressions about his first visit to the United States, his first General Conference, his first meeting with so many ministers and members of this Fellowship. What I got is a very skillfully executed look into a Third World mind. It gave me a lot to think about. —rrm)

He was six thousand miles away from home and it was difficult to imagine what might be running around in his mind.

No doubt, six thousand miles is a great distance for anyone, but add to those miles the inability to communicate well with one's hosts, strange foods and customs, and an endless series of new faces and ideas.

I could not help approaching this man sympathetically. I do not know how I would have handled all that had been thrust upon Reverend Sylvanus Maduka on his first visit to the United States.

Maduka was in St. Louis from September 3–6 as a part of his tour following *AFFIRMATION '76* in Washington, D.C. Before leaving his native Nigeria, he had

written in a letter to Reverend Elder Perry of the "joy and gladness" that he felt upon hearing that his visit would be made possible. He spoke of all the opportunities he would have to "... see many of the ceremonies, meet with the Elders, and share things in full and with confidence." I was anxious to find out how well the anticipation of his visit held up under the reality of the situation.

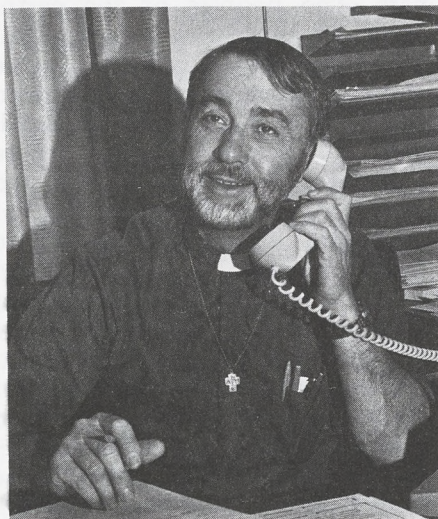
When I asked Reverend Maduka about the General Conference, I got the first hint of a theme that would play a major part in all of his reflections "... "You have so much, such nice facilities, so much money!" My efforts to assure him that all things financial were relative were to no avail. The man who had come so far was amazed at the large number of people who

Come!

problem areas, let me say that this entire issue of IN UNITY could be devoted to only the significant progress and growth of the Fellowship. However, the purpose of this article is to view difficulties that, in my opinion, need serious attention. We do not resolve problems or grow when we look only at our accomplishments and pat ourself on the back.

In the Fall of 1973, when I had the honor of being elected to serve as an Elder in our Fellowship, my experience was limited to the local church and, to some degree, as a District Coordinator. I had witnessed some major difficulties

within the Fellowship, but I never really felt that those problems included me or our local congregation because we always stood firm behind the Fellowship. I had been Pastor of MCC Dallas for over two years and had experienced the "routine" problems of a local congregation, including such drastic events as having three or four individuals attempting to rally the congregation to "kick out the Pastor." We also shared many



— photo by Gene Bricker

*"Yes, there was love. . .
so much love.
I shall return with it inside me
to share with the people
who hunger for it."*

had the resources to get to Washington for the conference. Their presence was an indication of wealth he could not comprehend.

Some of the same things that impressed him with their beauty in the United States capital saddened him with their extravagance.

When he turned specifically to the business and the fellowship at AFFIRMATION '76, Maduka seemed almost overwhelmed. Shaking his head and only occasionally looking up, he expressed his confusion with a long list of the things that had been a source of fright and confusion — ". . . task force, amendment, degender . . ." It became quite difficult at that point to discern exactly what relevance the decisions at General Conference would have for a foreign mission struggling for its mere existence.

When Reverend Maduka was faced with this question directly, the head-shaking and the list continued — ". . . interim reports, commissions, so many things . . ."

The reverend's answers to so many of my questions about the United States were, at the same time, refreshing and frustrating. The refreshing aspect came from the almost definitive shortness of his responses. Housing? (" . . . too much waste; many more people could live in this house!") Homosexuality? ("People should have the freedom to do as they please as long as it hurts no one else!") Outreaches and special programs in the Fellowship? (" . . . a luxury that can be afforded only by those churches who do not struggle for daily existence!") American hospitality? (" . . . very nice to me. . .")

My feelings of frustration came

occasions of joy, such as a Spirit-filled prayer circle on Thanksgiving Day as we stood in the rubble of the long-vacant building we had just started to purchase.

The attempt to "kick out the Pastor" was made, I learned, because certain individuals did not like my style of preaching. When I met with one of them, they put it this way: "We are sinners. We want fire-and-brimstone sermons that tell us we are sinners and that we must repent." My reply was: "You already know that you are sinners. In love, I will remind you of your Christian obligations but nobody will ever condemn anyone to Hell from my pulpit." I guess that was the start of my deep search for greater guidance in our worship service and in the preparation of my sermons. So, even such traumatic events as an attempt to dispose of the pastor can produce



primarily from wondering what Maduka was leaving unsaid — either as a result of his inability to communicate or from having had such little time to digest so many new experiences. Looking for a way to get his *general* impressions of the visit, I reminded him of his letter to Reverend Elder Perry. In it he had spoken of the "love" that he hoped to share with his brothers and sisters in America. After a long silence, thinking that my reminder was not going to elicit a response, I started to ask him specifically if he had encountered that "love." Waving off the question, he smiled first to himself and then at me. After another pause he spoke quietly, "Yes, there was love . . . so much love. I will return with it inside me to share with the people who hunger for it." ■

good. I received guidance in many ways and some of the thoughts expressed here are the result of that guidance.

When the church was established in Dallas, one of the first questions I asked the Board of Elders was: "Do you have a recommended order of worship and recommended prayers of worship?" The response was: "Yes, they are printed behind the By-Laws in the current edition of the By-Laws." It seemed reasonable to me that if we truly were a new revelation especially called by God to do a work, as I firmly believe, then the Holy Spirit would direct us, *as a body*, on how we were to do things. This direction would include a fitting worship and administration of the Sacraments to show uniformity in source and purpose. I am convinced that the Holy Spirit did that at the First General Conference when the order of worship and recommended prayers of Confession, Absolution, and Consecration were developed. Churches have prospered when they have used those guides faithfully. Churches that are having serious problems, I usually find, are not following those guides given to us. If we do not follow the instructions of God to accomplish the work as *God* would have it done, then we are in trouble. In effect, that was the great sin in the Garden of Eden.

Our Fellowship has really progressed in the short eight years since that first meeting held by Reverend Troy Perry in Los Angeles on October 6, 1968. The Fellowship was formed over a year after that first meeting, so that makes the progress and growth even more significant. As of General Conference 1976, we had 94 church bodies in seven countries around the world with 129 active

professional ministers in the Fellowship.

There is no doubt in my mind that God called Reverend Troy Perry to found and lead a new body . . . the new revelation . . . the everlasting Gospel to be preached to all. This new body was necessary to fulfill the promises of Jesus . . . a new body to be a beacon light in a world darkened by oppression, bigotry, hypocrisy, egotism, and selfishness. The peoples of the earth, especially those who deemed themselves to be "civilized," were allowing themselves to be drawn deeper into the mire of materialism . . . even to the point where the physical world was their god and they had become slaves of the world. We have a long way to go to overcome these things, even in self, and to be that beacon that God called us to be. We are in the latter days and the time is short. We need to be about the work of God and not allow ourselves to become embroiled in materialistic, temporary things. I truly believe that Christ will return in the lifetime of most of us!

Recently a good friend said to me: "I have read a great deal lately in the New Testament and, although I don't consider myself a Christian, I am very impressed with the early church. I don't feel the churches of today really reflect the early Christian church or the intent of the early Christian church. I think MCC comes the closest to it but it still does not do the job. I feel that, if I found a church as described in the New Testament, I would join that church in a minute." This was a person who is thoroughly familiar with MCC but has not joined MCC. He frequently attends MCC but the conduct of some individuals makes him feel that we are still lacking in the intent and pur-

poses of the primitive Christian church.

I agreed with him completely! Certainly individuals were not expressing the true Christian concept when they slandered, cursed, undermined, gossiped, sought self-fame, desecrated God's house, conspired to take the life-mate of another, etc. However, one should not deny opportunity for self because of the conduct of another. By entering the body, the body will gain strength and the Christian concept will flourish.

Without condoning the sin, we must also consider the prior experiences of those who form this new body. For the first time in history a truly ecumenical movement is proving successful . . . with both ministers and laity coming from all diverse backgrounds and religious experiences to form one body. The history of the church in the past has been the breaking away into separate bodies . . . whereas in our Fellowship it is the coming together of separate bodies to again form one body . . . the new revelation!

Various denominations have discussed ecumenical unity but they have not been able to come to an agreement . . . each wanted *their own way* . . . so a new body was formed. In viewing human conduct in this new body, we must consider that many of our people have returned to church after an absence of many years, if they had attended church at all in the past. Most did not understand the duties or responsibilities of belonging to a church or being an officer in a church. Tithing was misunderstood . . . many felt that a few coins or a dollar bill in the Sunday offering plate was all that was needed to do God's work. Some still retained old habits of pride, self-gratification, and wilfulness. But, of course, that is pre-

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Austin, Texas
408 W. 23rd St.

Sunday Worship — 2:00 PM

The Rev. Ruth R. Shivers, Pastor
Mail: POB 4091 — Austin 78765



METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Hartford, Connecticut
11 Amity St.

Sunday Worship — 7:30 PM

The Rev. F. Jay Deacon, Pastor
Mail: POB 514 — Hartford 06101



Christ Church
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
Miami, Florida
NW 22nd Av. & 26th St.
Sunday Worship — 3:00 PM
The Rev. Keith D. Davis, Pastor
Mail: POB 370963 — Miami 33137



METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
Providence, Rhode Island
63 Chapin Av.
Sunday Worship — 7:00 PM
The Rev. Joseph Gilbert, Pastor
Mail: POB 1462 — Providence 02901

cisely why the church is so badly needed . . . to help each other grow in Spirit and Truth . . . to learn the new life!

The world is watching to see if we mean what we say . . . to see if we practice what we preach . . . to see if we are really Christians or if we are merely playing at it. If we put on a false show of piety . . . of an overabundance of false "gifts," then we not only mock God but also curse self. Let me tell you, we must be serious about this matter! We are to love all . . . without exception. We are to welcome all . . . without exception. We are to preach to all . . . without exception. God wants us to be happy and to enjoy this life but, if we place self before the Lord's work, then we have betrayed our call as Christians. If we think we have a better plan than God and we reject God's plan for us, then we have again mocked God and have slammed the door to cut off the Everlasting Light. Individuals or small groups of individuals need to use caution that they not assume the authority of the entire Fellowship. I have great concern when I see an "Affirmation of Faith" or a "Statement of Policy" come from some source other than the Holy Spirit as directed through General Conference. Some of those statements are contrary to our By-Laws and sometimes contrary to sound Christian doctrine.

If we will but let it happen, God will move this Fellowship . . . God's Fellowship . . . to new heights and goals as best suits the purposes of God. God will bless and direct individuals to the place where they will best serve those purposes. But we must let it happen. We must not interfere. This means we must be wary of self-will, pride, and undue selfish ambition. We must work on self to make the total body strong.

Politics in the church are de-

structive . . . to the church and to the politicians. We have seen politically ambitious individuals come and go . . . churches have suffered momentarily . . . but eventually the church prospers and the work continues. I do not believe anyone should "run" for a position in the church, including the position of Pastor or Elder. The conduct of an individual should demonstrate their abilities and willingness to serve. Prayer

and meditation should be the guide. God may allow us to have our way so that we might learn a lesson. On the other hand, if we had sought and followed guidance from the Lord, we would have remained in God's will and avoided the need for the lesson.

What have I seen as I have looked over our Fellowship the past six years, especially the past three years as an Elder? I have seen growth, as mentioned earlier . . . and much love . . . and many Spirit-filled moments. I have also seen many stumbling blocks and problem areas. Let me give some general areas of concern without being specific in regard to person or place.

Above all other things, the Lord has truly impressed upon me the great importance of following the instructions of the Holy Spirit as given in the order of worship and Communion prayers. This service is truly an MCC service . . . It is *not* a Catholic mass . . . It is *not* a Nazarene revival . . . It is something special given for MCC and should be followed to express a unified form of worship that can be shared by all who may encounter MCC *anywhere*. I hold to this opinion because, in many ways, the Lord has placed it as a heavy burden on my heart. I will continue to hold to this in my ministry until the Holy Spirit moves to direct the *entire* Fellow-

ship in changes to the worship service and Communion by means of prayerful action through General Conference. In any case, it must be uniform to serve as a binding agent of unity in worship . . . How beautiful it is for us to come together as a family at conferences and share in a familiar, comfortable worship of the Lord! I am convinced of this and I feel that those who choose to disregard this guidance and feel that they are better fit to devise their own order of worship and prayers of Consecration are rejecting a tool given of God and they are being dictatorial at a local level. I know that statement will offend some, and I am sorry, but think about it, my friends!

We have many talented and self-sacrificing lay people working in

and with our churches. Many are generous and a true blessing to our Fellowship. A special example of this is one lay person who not only generously supports the local MCC, but also regularly sends a \$300 check to the Fellowship at least once a month. Bless his heart, he has been our salvation on several occasions as the coffers of the Fellowship approached zero with debts facing us. This gift is given in love and without fanfare and I know that his reward will be great. Others who are not able to support to that extent financially, give of their time and talents in great measure. God blesses you.

Contrast that with those individuals who seem to indeed be "playing church" in the sense that only token effort is made to do the work of the church. Some not only neglect contributing sufficiently in time, talent, and tithe to the church but they also generate negative attitudes and complain about the least important of things. These attitudes can be routed to areas that seriously

affect the operation of God's work in the Fellowship. The attitude of "self first" at the local level prevents the local church from growing as it should . . . that same attitude delays the payment of tithes to the Fellowship by the local churches . . . "we come first." *The tithe to God comes first . . . at both levels!* Churches are not meeting their obligation. For example, as of the end of September, 27% of the 80 church bodies in the USA still owed tithe for July and August! Some churches unfairly use the "designated fund" category to escape paying tithe on significant amounts of income . . . yet, our beautiful and prospering church in Sacramento pays 10% on ALL funds received, even if they are designated funds. Paraphrasing the words of Jesus (Lk 18:14): "I tell you, this church (Sacramento) went justified, rather than the other."

We also have self-seeking individuals who use the church to accomplish their own purposes . . . and I need not describe all possibilities in this area. We have some who try to control a congregation or the courses set by a local church . . . by any underhanded means necessary. We have some who try to control the destiny of the local church without regard to either the local church or the Fellowship. They manipulate and scheme, trying to collect their own following to support them, as they feed their ego on the poison of self-importance and infallibility. They disrupt, corrupt, and try to build the church in their own image that they might be god. This is the work of the Devil! Congregations need guard themselves against such individuals and treat them according to Scripture . . . counsel, exhort, and instruct with love . . . and, if all else fails, they are to be removed from the body for the welfare of the whole (Matthew 5:29, 30).

It seems to me that the By-Laws of our Fellowship are quite clear in regard to the responsibilities of the Pastor and the Board of Directors, yet there are frequent conflicts in this area. The Pastor is responsible for all matters related to the spiritual life of the church . . . the Board of

Directors is responsible for all temporal matters of the church. We have seen cases where the Board will try to dictate on spiritual matters; such as, guest preachers, spiritual exercises, sermon topics, order of worship, etc. We have also seen cases where a Pastor has dominated the Board and dictated their decisions on fiscal matters. Both of these conditions produces serious problems and a "backlash attitude" that will affect the next Pastor or the next Board. Let each tend to the matters given to their responsibility.

Ministers, by their calling, either professional or lay, have a serious obligation to present themselves as a worthy example of true Christian life. I am sorry, my friends, but if you accept the call you also accept the responsibilities. You have a responsibility to *lead* the flock to a better life . . . and no person will long follow a wayward shepherd. The example of your life *IS* your ministry and, if it is not Christian in nature, you will find your ministry fading because you will not be in the Lord's will. Practice what *Christ* would preach . . . do not teach such a loose lesson that it will justify the life you want to live in the world. Do not be a hypocrite of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Build yourself into a solid rock of Christian virtue that will cause others to seek those same goals. Do not believe you can lead others when you still have one foot in the gutter yourself. Examine self . . . do the comments apply?

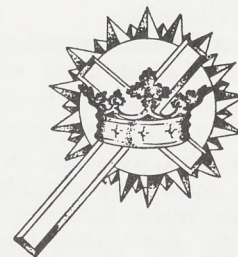
Some toes have been stepped on, I am sure. Otherwise, it would not have been useful for the points to have been discussed here. But, if you are indignant, first carefully examine *WHY* you are indignant . . . is it because the shoe pinches a little?

But there is one other point I must make in this article. The point is extremism . . . that element that not only disrupts within but keeps so many sisters and brothers from our doors! Extremism takes many forms and we see it appear increasingly at our conferences. It also exists in the local congregation. Sometimes we concentrate so much on the extremes that we fail to accomplish the important work at hand . . . we fail

to see the true vision of our mission as the new revelation. God is not the author of conflict. Extremes automatically generate conflict because the opposing sides are so far apart and a decision in favor of one side or the other is almost demanded by the extremists. We even see extremism in our worship service . . . extremely liturgical or extremely pentecostal . . . which can drive people away from the church and divide congregations. MCC is both (yet, neither) . . . we are that body called forth to preach (by word and action) the everlasting Gospel of the Christ to ALL people. Therefore, our worship of the Lord must be of such a nature that ALL will be able to worship and hear the word of God in MCC.

That is but one example of extremism. There are others in many areas: sexism, racism, social action, morality, and many more. Some day our Fellowship will need to face these issues directly . . . face to face. If we all keep our eyes on the common path set for us and remember our commission given by the Lord, the decisions will be easier and we can move forward to our destiny. If we allow our selfish motivations to press for extremes beyond our path, then we face a difficult time . . . much pain will be suffered as we struggle back to the path . . . and some will be lost.

Finally, in my love for you, I remind you of the command of Jesus to love one another. We use that topic frequently in our sermons and exhortations but do we listen? Love one another . . . each person and all people. Never let anyone walk away from you or your church with a feeling that "nobody cares." ■



CELLMATE



Fellowship Adopts Strong Criminal Justice Statement

A strong criminal justice statement, presented by the Board of Institutional Ministry, was approved by the 1976 General Conference of the UFMCC.

The statement, which appears in full in this issue of *Cellmate*, spells out the UFMCC stand on all major criminal justice reform issues.

In the first edition of the (UFMCC) *Prison Ministry Handbook*, it was stated that reform of the criminal justice system was virtually hopeless.

Now, almost unbelievably, two years later, changes are taking place. Slowly, but perceptibly, reform is creeping in.

MCC, through its Board of Institutional Ministry, is a member of one of the most powerful and effective reform groups in America, the Inter-Faith Coalition on Criminal Justice.

Rev. Joseph Gilbert and Rev. Richard Mickley, attending meetings of this organization over the last year, have

participated in sessions which determined decisive and effective action for killing S-1, the obnoxious Nixon-Mitchell rewrite of the U.S. Criminal Code, the moratorium on prison construction, and many other important criminal justice issues. See Rev. Gilbert's report on the latest meeting in this issue of *Cellmate*.

In California . . . Governor Brown signed into law a bill that repeals California's Indeterminate Sentence. It is good in the sense that a person sent to prison will know exactly when he/she will be released and not so good in that the fixed sentences in general will carry longer terms set by law. It should also be noted that murder will still carry a possible 7—life sentence.

In New York . . . Governor Carey convened a special session on August 4, 1976 of the New York State Legislature to deal with various court reform proposals as a result of the Dominick Commission Report issued in January

1973. The report states "Although the Commission found much that is right with the state court system, it found too much that is wrong. Administrative responsibility is fragmented. Criminal and civil case backlogs are too large. The need to resort to plea bargaining in criminal cases is too prevalent. Judges and other court personnel are allocated unevenly. Coordination with court-related agencies is insufficient. Long-range planning and the collection and analysis of data are deficient. The cost of the courts and court-related agencies is dispersed inequitably among the state and its municipalities, and there is no uniform budget for the entire court system. Court facilities are inadequate. The procedure for disciplining judges is cumbersome and lacks flexibility and public understanding. The bail system discriminates against the poor. The grand jury and preliminary hearing procedures have unnecessary duplicate steps."

UFMCC CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

UFMCC CONCERNS IN THE AREA OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN THE USA

The failures of the present system of criminal justice in the United States are widely apparent.

The rising crime rate and percentage of ex-offenders who return to prison show that the system neither deters nor rehabilitates.

The special inequities, injustices, and "double" punishment inflicted upon minorities, such as Blacks, gays, and people who speak with foreign accents, make criminal justice reform a particularly poignant concern of a church which is committed to preaching and working for liberation and a better life for all God's people.

In Matthew 25:34-36 the teaching of Jesus is clear. The Christians love of God is measured, yes, judged by our love, concern, and caring action toward people — people in need. "Then the King will say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you clothed me: I was sick and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me." Christians are told that they are responsible for the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned. Part of the cost and part of the joy of discipleship is serving our brothers and sisters in need. (1 John 4:20-21)

Because the Universal Fellowship believes in working for a more just criminal justice system everywhere it encourages its Board of Institutional Ministry and various appropriate jurisdictions to maintain membership in organizations, such as the Inter-religious Task Force on Criminal Justice, which are working through channels where they can be effective in reform and improvement of the criminal justice system.

The Metropolitan Community Church assembled in General Conference, standing along side a growing number of Christians concerned about the reform and improvement of the whole criminal justice system, is particularly concerned about the following:

1. That the Scriptural admonitions be obeyed.
2. The arbitrary use of discretionary power in dealing with offenders often punishes the poor and powerless, frees the rich and powerful and allows the prejudices of society to run unchallenged.
3. Jails, prisons, and lockups are at best human warehouses and at worst brutal unsanitary dens. Incarceration itself is dehumanizing and takes away from persons their economic base, breaks down their family ties, and separates them from helpful community resources.
4. Parole boards and prison disciplinary activity is grossly unfair to the prisoner in their total lack of due process at the hearings.
5. They are very often extremely abusive and judgmental if the word "homosexual" appears anywhere in the prisoner's "jacket."
6. Parole boards often base their decisions about the amount of time to be served on insufficient and inaccurate information which is not subject to public scrutiny.
7. Many alleged offenders are kept in jail solely because of inability to pay bail money.
8. Too much money, effort, and time spent on security and far too little on helping prisoners develop skills and attitudes for reintegration into society.

Therefore, we believe and hold it to be our position:

1. That alternatives to incarceration and diversion programs (detoxification centers for the care of alcohol and drug abusers, halfway houses, release on own recognizance, bail reform, trial diversion to allow for resolution before charges are filed, probation, work/study releases, and weekend sentences) be used whenever applicable.

2. That paying bail bond for release pending trial be replaced by a more just system which might include release to the supervision of a reasonable person, a non-profit agency, a probation or parole officer, or, as a last resort, detention with release during certain hours.

3. That prison populations be reduced instead of building new prisons.

4. That more community-based correctional centers be established in order to keep offenders close to home and utilize existing community resources for rehabilitation.

5. That there be an end to indeterminate sentencing.

6. That victimless crimes be de-criminalized.

7. That appropriate legislation be enacted and enforced to guarantee minimum standards for all jails and prisons and to safeguard the right of prisoners to due process.

8. That behavior modification methods such as shock and drug

therapy never be administered unless freely requested by a prisoner under no threat or coercion.

9. That youth offenders be housed only with their peer group.

10. That there be an end to automatic discrimination, persecution, and parole denials directed towards prisoners known to be or suspected of being homosexual. That bona fide segregation for the prisoner's safety and welfare is not equivalent to perpetual denial of all privileges or long terms in isolation. That educational efforts should be directed toward raising the consciousness of prison officials, parole boards, judges, and police officers: that gay people are people; that they are not vicious, degenerate, or incorrigible, just because they are gay; that God loves homosexuals; that gay people should be treated with the dignity deserved by all human beings and enjoy equal rights and privileges; that stereotyping is unjust; and inhuman treatment is immoral.

Paid In Full?

by Sheldon Haight

(Sheldon is the Area Representative in the northwest area of the United States. He writes in this first person. He's a deacon in MCC Seattle and has been involved in MCC prison ministry for four years.)

Why does "Christian" society continually and forever hold an ex-offender's past record in front of his/her eyes? Prisoners have served their time and have paid their debt to society. But society, as an unfit parent, holds the ex-offender's past always in the present to let it have its effect on the future!

What would it be like if God, our Creator, forever held us accountable for our past misdeeds, even after the price has been paid? Would it not make forgiveness a mockery? Would it not nullify the sacrifice of the only Begotten Son? Such would be demonic! But God doesn't do this, rather we have free access to God through Jesus Christ. Our offences, paid in full and nailed to the cross, are separated from us as far as east is from west, to be mentioned no more. Only Satan stands up to be our eternal accuser.

It would seem, then, that society is Satan's advocate. In society's eyes the past is not dead and buried, the past is not past, the debt has not been paid. This argues that everyone is beyond "rehabilitation," that no one matures, and no one grows into respectable adulthood; especially not the ex-offender!

But we, as the Church, the Body of Christ, are not general society, nor are we to be conformed to this world. We are to live transformed lives, having our minds (that is our thoughts, emotions, and wills) renewed by the mind of Christ. According to I Corinthians 2:12-16, thus having the understanding of Christ we should be able to search all things and discern what is of God. Condemnation and unforgiveness are not of Christ, neither is the one who is the accuser of those who have paid their

debt to society. Is it not enough to have served their time and more! The more being the loss of human dignity, the humiliation, and the deprivation of loving relationships.

It is true that we cannot be our brother's and sister's keepers (jailers), but we must be brothers and sisters to those around us. We are reminded to bring spiritual restoration to the ones who are weak, but in the spirit of meekness, not condescension. We, too, are not above temptation and weakening faults. (Galatians 6)

So then, what will your attitude be towards our brothers and sisters who are either incarcerated or ex-offenders? Will you play the devil's advocate and look upon us as social lepers? Will you say that we cannot be trusted? Will you smile outwardly, but inwardly reject us when we are in your midst? Will you advocate locking us out by your attitudes of rejection and ignorance? We are your brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have received cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ. Will you be brothers and sisters to us and accept us as we are? Or will you side with those about whom our Lord spoke in Matthew 25:41-45 — "... Depart from me, you cursed . . . for I was hungry and you gave me no meat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in; naked and you did not clothe me, and in prison and you did not visit me . . . Inasmuch as you did it not to the least of these, you did it not to me." And again He said, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with what measure you give, it will be measured unto you." (Matt. 7:2)

I hope you will measure out love and acceptance, peace and understanding to us, for we have seen and experienced enough condemnation and rejection, hatred and neglect. We are your brothers and sisters, just as you are ours. Let us take heed to the last words of Christ upon the cross: "Paid in Full!"

A TESTIMONY

It has been a while since I have written an article. As I sit here isolated from the free world I keep wondering how much of a new adjustment I will have to make when I return to society. Then I received a card in the mail today and when I opened it, there were 37 or 38 names, names of friends, brothers and sisters who care about me. Some of them I knew but most I didn't but all of them wanted to wish me a special greeting. It was one of the best gifts I have ever received in that these people showed me that they care and that they thought of me. Before receiving the card I was really down but as long as I know that these people care I can never let them down and there will always be something to live for. They have brought a new meaning to my life.

If you are wondering who these people are — they are you — the people of MCC. Bless you for your daily prayers. With your support I will have no trouble in beginning a new life for myself. I enjoy helping others and when others help me it shows me that God is helping me to do the right things. I pray I will continue to listen to God and not be tempted. By God's Grace all this will come true. Take care, my friends, for without you I would surely have died in many ways a long time ago.

Terry McLain
from MCC St. Louis,
The New Light, October 1976



THE CELLMATE continues on page 39

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of
theological
reflection
from Metropolitan
Community Church



**BEHOLD, I will do
A new THING** Is. 43:19

GRALLEY



"HOW COULD THE PROPONENTS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BE SO BLIND AS TO NOT SEE THE TERRIBLE INCONGRUITY BETWEEN WHAT THEY CLAIMED FOR THEMSELVES AND WHAT THEY DENIED TO OTHERS?"

THIS YEAR WE CELEBRATE the 200th anniversary of this country's founding, and thus it is quite appropriate that General Conference be held in the nation's capitol in 1976.

In looking back over the record of the United States' founding and growth, I find myself asking, "What will Americans 100 years from now consider to be their country's most valuable contribution to humanity during its first 200 years of existence? Will it be the 1776 statement of political equality as a goal? Or will it be the tremendous technological advances pioneered by this nation?" I don't think that America's most significant contribution will be either of these achievements, important though as they are. The first is simply a statement of intention, and as we all know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. And I need not point out that technological expertise has never been restricted to this country. I firmly believe that America's greatest contribution to humanity is its tortured, tragic, yet courageous *history* of how this nation has tried, over the past 200 years, to honor the words in its Declaration of Independence, "... all men are created equal..." To espouse a goal like this and to effectively incorporate it into the

moral fabric of this nation's life are two different things. The idea of such equality has not yet been adequately translated into reality, and we, as an oppressed people, are clear testaments to that failure. Yet, the glory of America resides in the fact that it had enough courage to publicly declare as its goal the molding of its national life in such a way as to make equality a fact instead of a dream. No other nation prior to 1776 and few since then have dared to emulate America's courage in setting up such a goal for itself.

We've yet to reach that goal, but it's always been there, right before us. It has always been something to shoot for, something by which to gage our nation's shortcomings, something that always lighted the path to which this nation has been called to travel.

So it is the *history* of America's successful and unsuccessful efforts to achieve this goal that will prove to be its most valuable contribution to future generations. But it will be valuable only if we — and those who follow us — will take that history seriously, if we will allow it to speak to us and point out pitfalls and solutions to problems that we face and will face as we continue to strive to do adequate homage to the idea that "... all men are created equal..."

Perhaps the first place that we can contribute to the realization of this goal is to change the phrase just quoted to read "... all men *and women* are created equal..." But the feminist movement is not what I want to focus on today. Instead, I want to look very briefly at another chapter in this nation's history — its struggle with the issue of slavery — and explore what that history has to say to us today.

During the past few months I've developed a real interest in the history of the black church in America, and I've been comparing the social dynamics that gave it birth to those that brought the gay religious movement into existence. There are some strikingly similar parallels in the two histories. On the basis of this comparison, it seems to me that gay Christians have a great deal to learn from our black counterparts, for their struggles in many ways reflect our own. Many of the problems that we face, and will face, have already been confronted by black Christians, with varying degrees of success. And if we in the gay religious movement come to take black church history seriously, we will most certainly fare better than those who have gone before us.

In the course of exploring the dynamics that led to the founding of black churches, I inevitably looked at the "peculiar institution" known as slavery. That the United

common ROOTS

States — the first new nation, the elect nation, the nation that supposedly had the soul of a church, the great model of modern democracy — that this country moved into the nineteenth century with one of the largest and cruelest of slave systems in its midst, with full constitutional protection, is surely one of the world's greatest ironies and terrible tragedies. One wonders how a nation that fervently subscribed to the notion that all persons are created equal, with certain inalienable rights, could in good conscience enslave a whole race of human beings. How could the proponents of the Declaration of Independence be so blind as to not see the terrible incongruity between what they claimed for themselves and what

**"THE AMERICAN HIERARCHY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH NEVER DID PRO-
NOUNCE SLAVERY AN
INHERENT EVIL."**

they denied to others — all in the name of God? Perhaps even more shocking was the attitude of the churches on the issue of slavery. Simply stated, their silence on the subject was deafening. Over 200 years had passed since the landing of the first slaves on these shores before there were any significant efforts on the part of the American religious community to even address the issue. Of course there were always isolated voices questioning the moral legitimacy of enslaving human beings, but the effect of those uneasy consciences on the nation was like standing before a storm of apathy and trying to shout above it to be heard.

There were many reasons for the churches' reluctance to be critical of the institution of slavery — the desire for unity of church at any price, the fact that a large chunk of the nation's economy was dependent on the maintenance of slavery, a 1900-year tradition of slavery and institutional Christianity existing side by side in relative harmony, and the sheer impossibility of even being able to conceptualize a black person's being "equal" to a white person. Despite all these reasons, we still remain struck by the apparently large degree of spiritual insensitivity in the "land of the free." We wonder, and rightfully so, if our forebearers were not as intelligent and mature as we are. After all, there is no question in our minds that slavery is a terrible evil; how could one *not* see that? It is sheer hubris to assume that the founding fathers were stupid and blind. They were as intelligent as we are; their capacity for spiritual sensitivity was no less than ours is. The *only* advantage that we have is 200 years of hindsight since the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

A wave of self-righteous indignation necessarily sweeps over us when we consider the blot of human bondage on our nation's history. But we must surely reserve our harshest judgment for the American church. If any segment of our society should be sensitive and openly critical of the sinfulness of enslaving human beings, it should be the gathered community of the people of God, the corporate body of Jesus Christ. But such was not the case. As a matter of fact, the church provided some of the most articulate

spokespersons for the maintenance of slavery. Ingenious arguments were put forth in an attempt to justify human bondage on the basis of scripture and natural law. Abolitionists were labelled pagans, heretics and anti-Christians. And many Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists were of the firm opinion that abolitionism was an anti-Christian plot, an attempt to destroy the integrity of American family life. Slaveholders were assured by understanding clergy that baptism of slaves did not require that the master free them — it was quite proper and theologically sound for a Christian to own another Christian. In fact, the

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church emphasized that a Christian slave would be even more obedient to his master since he was taught that disobedience would automatically invoke divine retribution. It is obvious that the marks of so-called "true Christianity" — modesty, meekness, humility and faithfulness — meant something different for black people than for whites. In 1749 a Congregationalist minister named Thomas Bacon wrote a pamphlet entitled "Two Sermons Preached to a Congregation of Black Slaves." In it he noted that:

Slaves should serve God because he made them and appointed them to be slaves and because they have souls to be saved . . . This God they must love with all their

by Howard Wells
a sermon delivered at General Conference

hearts, not least because he brought them out of a land of darkness and ignorance to a country where they might learn a sure way to heaven . . . their duty toward their masters and mistresses was summed up in one general rule that they ought always to carry in their minds — and that is — to do all service for them, as if they did it for God himself, for the masters are God's overseers.

By 1750, Georgian colonialists were agreed that the opportunity to live among civilized white Christians and hear the Gospel was ample compensation to the black slave for any inconvenience that he or she might suffer.

And Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell, in 1861, argued that:

Slavery is a real and effective discipline, and without it, we are profoundly persuaded that the African race in the midst of us can never be elevated in the scale of being. As long as that race, in its comparative degradation, co-exists, side by side, with the white, bondage is its normal condition.

Ironically, the finest biblical defense of slavery came not from a Southern Protestant, but from an Irish Roman Catholic — John England, bishop of the Charleston Diocese. His argument, of which scriptural justification was a critical part, consisted largely of a historical survey of the Catholic tradition in which he conclusively proved that the Roman Catholic Church had always sanctioned the institution of slavery. As a result

“THE CHURCH PROVIDED SOME OF THE MOST ARTICULATE SPOKESPERSONS FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF SLAVERY.”

of his work, the American hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church never did pronounce slavery an inherent evil.

The reaction — or rather, non-reaction — of American religious institutions to the issue of slavery is a perfect example of the church's being seduced by the cultural milieu in which it finds itself. The interests and prejudices of which society gradually became the interests and prejudices of the church. As a result, the church lost its ability to maintain a critical perspective on American culture: it lost its ability to speak a prophetic word. It forgot that even though the church may be in the world, it is not to be of the world. It ceased being the body of Christ and became a false religious front for oppression, bigotry and hatred, a sounding board for a nation of slaveholders, an institutional means for legitimizing a grievous social cancer. Little wonder that black theologian James Cone says that only those who stand outside or are forced outside the mainstream of society — the despised, the rejected the oppressed — can clearly see and be faithful to what the Christian faith is really about, for it is only those who stand outside who can maintain a critical perspective on what's going on inside.

The 18th and 19th century American religious community had no monopoly on spiritual blindness. We need only to consider the reactions of some of the most famous Christian thinkers of this century to the horror that was National Socialism in Germany.

One theologian, in particular, who exhibited an extraordinary amount of insensitivity to institutional evil was that giant, Karl Barth. In 1934 Barth lashed out at Nazism, *not* because it stripped the German

“WHEN WE DENY OUR OWN POTENTIAL TO MAKE SIMILAR GRIEVOUS ERRORS, WE RENDER OURSELVES EVEN MORE LIKELY TO STUMBLE.”

people of basic civil rights, and *not* because it persecuted the Jews, but because it was undermining the established authority of the institutional church by trying to unite elements of the Protestant leadership under a man who was handpicked by Adolph Hitler.

Even at that time, Barth did not regard Nazism as an affront to human dignity. It wasn't until 1938 that he finally came to realize that the National Socialist movement was essentially anti-Christian — one year before the Second World War! Why this incredible blindness? Because Barth held that if the immediate, direct welfare of the church is not threatened, the church should keep her mouth shut — the same argument the American church used to avoid speaking out on the issue of slavery. Thus, since the Jews were not part of the church, Barth ignored the blatant anti-Semitism of National Socialism until 1938 when the handwriting was on the wall in letters so large and so clear that even the most insensitive Christian would not require a Daniel to interpret them; but then it was too late. Had Barth regarded the persecution of the Jews as an evil in itself, he would have surely recognized the anti-Christian



nature of Nazism years before his 1938 proclamation. Yet, when confronted with the question why he and the German church did not speak out against anti-Semitism more decisively and in a more timely manner, Barth pleaded that:

... it was first of all fair and just to give even the political experiment of National Socialism as such its time and chance.

Just as the American church gave slavery its time and chance — for 250 years! Where did Barth go wrong? Where did the American church go wrong? Allow me to suggest that both Barth and the American church erred when they founded their theologies regarding Nazism and slavery respectively on

“How could the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians have been so blind? Why couldn’t they see the evil of gay oppression? It’s so obvious to us!”

How might we react to these all-too-typical examples of hypocrisy on the part of the institutional church? Well, we might wrap ourselves in a cloak of self-righteousness and disavow any further association with church or religion as so many gay persons have done. Or we might try to identify, if even briefly, with those Christians who made these terrible errors in judgment. If we do this, we will come to realize that they are not evil people; they are just human beings — so fragile,

ence of that inherent human frailty within ourselves; but saying it isn’t there doesn’t make it go away. In fact, when we deny our own potential to make similar grievous errors, as if the denial wipes out the reality, we render ourselves even more likely to stumble.

How might *we* avoid being lured into those traps to which some of the greatest Christian minds have fallen victim, much less the average person? I think there are two approaches to solving this problem, and we must use both of them. The first is this — instead of categorically rejecting those Christians who embraced slavery,

“SURELY, 100 YEARS FROM NOW, AMERICANS WILL RECOIL IN HORROR WHEN THEY READ OF THE CRIMINAL POSITIONS ADOPTED ON THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY THIS YEAR BY THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, AND THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.”

political expediency rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here’s a lesson for us at MCC. If we are to do legitimate Christian theology, let us be wary of tainting our theological efforts with church politics and political expediency.

Where, today, might we find this crass spiritual insensitivity on the part of the institutional church? It is my contention that history will show the American religious community to be sorely lacking in its handling of the gay issue. God has weighed the church in the balances and it has been found wanting. Surely, 100 years from now, Americans will recoil in horror when they read of the criminal positions adopted on the issue of homosexuality this year by the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Methodist Church, and the United Presbyterian Church. Future generations of Christians will ask themselves,

so easily lead to make mistakes, so very frightened to step outside their culture in order to gain a critical perspective and proclaim a prophetic word. Are they any less intelligent, any less moral, any less perceptive than we are? Of course not. The chances are very good indeed that we would have done the very same things and made the same errors in judgment as they did. Why? Because we, too, are human, which means that we, too, are very frail and subject to error. By throwing up a smokescreen of self-righteous indignation, by being harsh in our judgments of the failures and spiritual blindness of others, we are denying the exist-

the National Socialist Party, or even homophobia, let us find the courage to put ourselves in their shoes in order to discover where they were coming from — let’s be honest enough to admit that there’s a little of the slaveholder, the Nazi, the homophobic, in each of us. When we do this, we allow history to speak to us, pointing out the errors of the past and showing us how to avoid dragging those errors into the future. Do we have the wisdom to learn from history? If we do, we have it within our reach to avoid making many tragic mistakes. Paul, the Apostle, recognized the usefulness of finding ourselves in others when, in his letter to the Romans, he wrote:

... you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another: for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.

The second approach is even more basic than the first. page 11

FFO

UFMCC's Commission on Faith, Fellowship and Order was formed three years ago to provide a forum for discussion of some of our community's basic questions about faith, theology and biblical

1

**What is theology?
How does it relate
to the Christ Story?**

Every person is a theologian. Every declaration about God is a theological statement — even the denial of God's existence.

Theology is thinking about God and our relationship to God. It is the human attempt to know and describe God. It is reflection on the human experience in relationship with the Ultimate and the Infinite.

Theology says that it is not enough to recite pious phrases and Biblical verses. To do theology is to get at the meaning of these phrases and verses. We have all heard pious phrases like "God bless you" and "God loves you." These are not theological statements per se. A theologian would step in and ask, "What does it mean that God blesses us?" "What does it mean that God loves us?" The Bible states that God raised Jesus from the dead. The job of theology is to take this Biblical affirmation and to answer the question, "What is the importance of God raising Jesus from the dead?" "What is the meaning of this event?" To do theology then is to reflect on the statements of faith. It is using our minds to try to understand and to interpret rather than just repeating a belief, or a pious phrase, or a Biblical verse.

Theology falls into two categories — natural and revealed. Natural theology tells *that* God is;

interpretation. At the 1975 General Conference, FFO was charged with presenting a paper this year in Washington focussing on six major questions. Since then, District FFO workshops and local churches have studied, discussed, and debated the six questions about MCC's mission and theological task. Here is the Commission's "interim report", adopted by the Conference for study during the current year.

revealed theology tells us *who* God is.

Natural theology is that which we can know about God and God's ways through observation of, and reflection upon, the universe. However, there are things about God that we cannot know through observation and reason. They must be revealed to us. This is the basis of revealed theology. We can find out for ourselves that there is a God. It must be shown to us what this God is like and what this God purposes.

Jesus the Christ is God's revelation in history. The God who is

revealed in Jesus Christ is the same God who has been revealed from the beginning to the patriarchs and the prophets. This revelation continues for us in the Church which is the living Body of Christ — the continuation of the incarnation. Therefore, our thinking as Christians about God must be in the context of God's self-disclosure in Jesus the Christ. The unique revelation of God upon which Christianity relies is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was God revealing God in the clearest possible way.

The historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ is mediated to us through the Holy Scriptures. Our present reflection about God must be consistent with the Jesus proclaimed in the Scriptures.

God's continuing revelation in Christ is known through the people of God. In the Church's Scriptural teaching and preaching of the Christ Story, and in the continuing experience of the Risen Christ through the Church's worship and loving service, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Looked upon in this light, theology is a never-ending task. It is never ended because being a human endeavor it must use human concepts and human words. The thought structures and language of humans are always changing, and thus theology is always changing. The basic truth and faith behind theology remain the same. The Bible and the historical traditions of the Christian Church remain the same. The

theology, however, which interprets these given basics is always evolving and developing. There is change in theology for three reasons. First, we grow in our faith and in our relationship with God. Second, because we progress in our understanding of the given basics; we develop better tools and skills to study the Bible, church history, tradition, etc. Third, because human culture around us is changing, and we must find ways to communicate our faith to other people so that they can understand it. The task of theology is to explain our faith and our message to the people in terms that they can understand. Thus the way theology is done and worded is always changing to accomplish that task.

2 What is the theological task of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches?

Theology is a human attempt to know and describe God. Through the theological process we study God, God's ways, and God's dealings with humankind. Theology says it is not enough to recite pious phrases, Bible verses, or statements of faith; to do theology is to get at the meaning of these phrases, verses and statements of faith and their implications for the Church today.

To define the theological task of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches means to state the areas of theological concern MCC should be asking itself and the Christian Church. We must begin by exploring the personal revelation given to Troy Perry and continues now in our corporate fellowship. To adequately approach this, we must remember that a revelation is God's self disclosure to humanity about Him/Herself. The initial revelation was that God does love everyone, including gay men and women; the continuing revelation is that God wills a church to exist in this world to live and proclaim that message.

Our theological task is then, two-fold: (1) to determine the

implications of God's universal love for our church's life and ministry; (2) to determine the implications of God's revealing that message through a church composed of worshipping communities constituted primarily of gay Christians. Our theological reflection, however, about MCC as an instrument of God's revelation must be evaluated in the light of God's revelation in Christ Jesus.

Suggested areas of concern to explore are:

(1) *Ecumenism* — To bind together a group of believers from diverse religious traditions primarily because of sexual identity. MCC is attempting to be an ecumenical fellowship, i.e., to adopt a statement of faith and corporate expression that is both cohesive enough to bind us together into a community of Christians but open enough to allow for individual beliefs.

(2) *Human Sexuality* — To say that "God accepts everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation," does not adequately explain the relationship between sexuality and a Christ-centered life. Again, the above quote is a pious phrase that needs to be explained, e.g., What does it mean to be accepted by God? What is sexual orientation? Is every sexual act included? If not, what determines which acts are and are not? What does it mean to be sexual? To be Christian? To be both?

(3) *Prophetic Mission* — The message of our fellowship is prophetic in that it may challenge some of the traditional views of the Judeo-Christian heritage.

(4) *Human Liberation* — We often hear from the pulpits of MCC that Christ Jesus is our Liberator. In itself, to say that "Christ Jesus is our Liberator" is not a theological statement but a "pious phrase" on which we need to do theology to find the deepest meaning. To get this meaning we must ask certain questions, e.g., From whom or what does Jesus liberate us? How does Jesus liberate us? Is this liberation only a future event, i.e., "pie in the sky by and by," or does Jesus liberate us now? Is Jesus only concerned with "spiritual" liberation? Does

the liberation that Jesus offers have anything to do with the liberation movements, e.g., Black, Latino, Native American, Gay, Feminist, of today? If so, how much and in what ways? Once we begin to answer questions like these, we can then begin to say that we are developing a theology of human liberation, i.e., we are discovering what the deepest implications of what it means to say that Christ Jesus is our Liberator.

3 How do we define the community to which we are called to minister?

Current discussion about the community to which MCC is called to minister has begun to polarize into two identifiable views:

(a) On one view, MCC's community of ministry includes all humanity. Since it is a Christian Church, its missionary efforts and resources must be directed toward all people. There may be no implication of exclusivity in our ministry.

(b) On the other view, the community that MCC is called to serve should be defined as primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, the Gay community. Since many churches are unable or unwilling to faithfully preach to Gospel to Gay people and do not effectively respond to their spiritual and social needs, then Gay persons must have the opportunity to seek their own worshipping communities. Despite noises to the contrary, this definition of community has been the one that most people in MCC have implicitly accepted. They have done so with uneasy conscience, because it appears to be contrary to Scriptural demands. Since Christ's Church is for everyone, then all Christian congregations must reflect that all-inclusiveness in their constituency. Thus the problem facing us in responding to this question is the dilemma of apparent Scriptural demands versus sociological reality.

Sociological reality has, in fact, placed persons in community. MCC must, therefore, relate not

merely to persons as if isolated, but as *persons-in-community*.

The Church's mission involves the creating and sustaining of community. If by *community* we mean individuals seeking mutual development of God-given potentialities, our task has begun. Always, the Christian community is a beginning, a becoming: never a perfect completion.

Yet we must speak of *community* in a variety of senses, for as we have recognized, persons exist in community. By *community* we mean a central, ministering core group; we may mean a wider Church community of persons whose intensity of involvement is not equal; or we may speak of even wider communities to which we may be called to minister in direct or remote ways. Our very existence is a ministry to the total world community. A recognition of this total family of God's children, in communion with God or estranged, is one meaning of the word "ecumenical."

We may, therefore, speak of *community* as persons related to us in spiritual communion in Christ. We may also speak of persons whose spiritual core we have not heretofore reached, but to whom we may nevertheless minister at other levels. We must never say to any person, "What have we to do with you?" for all the earth's people are related in human community, and all are potential objects of the Church's ministry.

In each response to the question of the definition of MCC's community of ministry, an important theological concept is central:

(a) The first answer chooses the inclusive nature of the Christian Gospel as the decisive theological consideration. If sexual or ethnic minorities and others have been discriminated against elsewhere, this position goes, it must not be so here. MCC must be a model for integration and nondiscrimination.

(b) To the second answer, the central theological concept is the notion of election: a called and chosen people, on the model of the calling of Israel or the es-

tablishing of the Church. In both instances a group of people, who for the most part were previously uncommitted to one another in any significant manner, shared a common experience of having their oppression/slavery transformed into liberation by the divine hand. Each community found motivation for common commitment to one another on the basis of their common liberation experience. Each was commanded to keep the relevance and power of the liberation experience alive by reflecting on it, as a *community*, in the format of worship. Similarly, to challenge the theological legitimacy of Gay people forming a worshipping community separate from the wider institutional religious community is to challenge God's wisdom and right to act as S/He will.

These two themes — inclusion and election — now find themselves set in opposition. But the opposition is only the clash of a generally understood idea (inclusion) with one often tragically misunderstood (election). We must examine the latter, for its proper understanding is pivotal to our consideration.

Israel continually struggled with the concept of election. In a positive vein, the prophets proclaimed the purpose of Israel's election to be a "light to the nations." On the other hand, Israel, propelled by a distorted election-consciousness, attempted to exterminate the Caananite people — whom it viewed as rejected and unacceptable before God. Genocide against Jews, Gays, and others has been the consequence of distorted notions of election; an example is the case of Nazi Germany — Hitler only sought to carry out what churches had been preaching for centuries. If a group thinks of itself as specially chosen "insiders," it is likely to become self-righteous and to conclude that the non-elect have no right to exist.

The Christian's model for "election" is Jesus. He understood his calling as a call to servanthood. Jesus was a servant, recognizing the value of every person and every person's poten-

tial relatedness to God. Historically, however, the Church, like Israel, has often misunderstood its election. Therefore it has needed prophets to lift up the election model of Jesus the Christ.

The community of faith may be expected to share a common experience, commitment and call. While it must never be exclusionary, it may reflect a sociological commonality. But if it is Christian, it does not exist for itself. The moment it does, it misunderstands election and becomes a threat to every "outsider." Jesus came to include every outsider, every victim of oppression. We must make common cause with all oppressed people, precisely because of our particular call.

We must learn to understand oppression in all of its forms as that which inhibits realizing of one's potential for relatedness to God, the self and the neighbor.

It is likely for the foreseeable future that our congregations may be largely Gay in composition. That is congruent with our call and our beginnings. But also congruent with our call is the fact that we exist for the world. Our very existence is a prophetic witness to the world and the Church.

To seek to serve *only* the "Gay community," however, is not only a misunderstanding of our call; it is also a misunderstanding of our humanity. We must learn to discard our limiting categories for human persons, and recognize that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, straight nor gay.



How might we focus or bring to bear the Christian Gospel on the needs of the community we have defined?

The Christian Gospel is the "Good News" that God comes to us in Christ, speaks to us, and acts for us and through us in unconditional love. The Gospel can and must reach into human existence at every point. Because that is our affirmation, we dare to focus and bring to bear the Christian Gospel on the needs of the community

we have defined.

First of all, what needs are we speaking of? Certainly not the needs of isolated individuals or an abstract "community," but the needs of individuals-in-community. We might speak of three inter-related needs:

(1) The need to deal with where we have come from — our brokenness, our sin, our pain, our struggles, our fears, failures, hopes and dreams. This is the need for acceptance and healing.

(2) The need to know and decide who we are in relationship to God, to ourselves and others; to experience the dynamic transformation from "no people" to "the people of God"; the need to respond to God's calling us out, recognizing our own uniqueness, and our common createdness.

(3) The need to decide where we are going — where God is leading us. What is our purpose, our mission? All people need to be challenged to give what only they can give. "We must believe in Destiny, and that it stands in need of us" — Martin Buber, theologian.

How do we focus the Gospel on those needs?

(1) Through *Prophetic Criticism* — Through the Holy Spirit, prophecy notes the "signs of the times" and speaks the truth in love. The task of prophetic criticism is to liberate theology from intellectualism, dogmatism, shallowness and elitism; and we must invite every person to join us in a "grass-roots" (i.e., coming from our own experience), innovate, dynamic, open, Spirit-filled theologizing community. Our method of theologizing is based on the continuous interplay of action and reflection. The data for our concrete theologizing comes from real-life situations, when we come up against brokenness, fear and despair in our brothers and sisters. Prophetic criticism seeks to shatter false idols that keep us from God, such as materialism, dogmatism, and all forms of false security and religiosity.

(2) Through *Prophetic Creativity* — The Gospel clearly states that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

We might also say "All are oppressed and are in need of God's liberation." All persons must identify and face their own oppression, with the additional realization that when one person is oppressed, all are oppressed. The recognition of our own oppression, in whatever form, affords us the great opportunity to bring the secular and the sacred into a new dynamic relationship. Not that our oppression itself makes us more worthy of God's love; rather, it makes us more receptive to God's love.



We must embrace with a sense of certainty the knowledge that the Spirit is indeed about a "new thing" in our history, and that there is nothing any of us can do to make it happen or to stop it from happening. We can simply listen to the Spirit, who still speaks in the Church, and respond, enriching our lives and those of the community we serve. To do so is to rediscover the power of Pentecost. To fail to do so is to relegate ourselves to irrelevancy. What God is doing in our midst in the freedom and power of the Spirit is the meaning of our lives.

We must therefore:

(1) Structure times, places and resources for reflection on ultimate concerns, and for corporate celebration of the relevance, power and authority of the Gospel to transform lives and peoples; worship, and a flexible, dynamic approach to education must lie at the heart of our ministry.

(2) Structure an environment in which community and person-

hood may flourish: where people are free to ask, "Where have we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?"; where people can experience the process of acceptance, healing, growth, challenge and commitment; where people can realize the free gift of the grace of God-in-Christ, and be challenged to true discipleship.

(3) Assume a stance of advocacy for all oppressed peoples, making clear the connection between gay persons and all persons, between gay oppression and all oppression — and finding in Jesus Christ the chief Advocate of all the earth's peoples.

(4) Honestly explore and develop our understandings of ethics and lifestyle in relationship to the Gospel.

(5) Do the day-in, day-out work of love and caring by reaching out and serving the very complex and pluralistic community around us.

5

How might we reflect or manifest that focusing task our worship?

(To be reported on at the 1977 General Conference)

6

What is the unique emphasis of the Christian ministry of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches?

Human sexuality has been MCC's point of entry or "door" to our mission. This church came into existence affirming that homosexuality is a valid manifestation of the divine creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God. Thus, sexuality is a gift of God. From the beginning MCC has preached that gay people, along with all people, share the benefits of God's grace.

Jesus taught by his example that human sexuality is to be dealt with in the same way as any other aspect of humanness. In contrast, human beings, ever since the fig leaves of Adam and Eve, have considered sexuality with fear, shame, and awe. Further-

continued page 12

Inverse makes
the same mistake
twice as easy to see

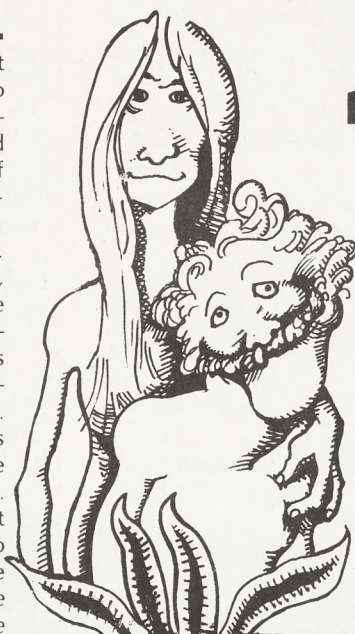
SCENE ONE:

The Sunday School Lesson

STAGEMANAGER: We have a modest proposal for you today. We have to say from the start it is not a particularly fair proposal. It entails a world made of two very different kinds of people. There are fems — and malefems. They even look different. (*Indicates fem and malefem to either side. During her description the fem flexes, making noisy, aggressive sounds.*) The fems wear clothing that is light, comfortable, well-suited to the fem's responsibilities of protecting, maintaining and enjoying her property. Fems run the world and they dress for it . . . The malefems, on the other hand, do not run the world. The vast majority of them would not want to run the world, being so clearly ill-equipped to do so. Notice the strange garb of the malefem (*he poses, coolly changing positions like a professional model*). Particularly the large opening at the bottom. Obviously this would hamper their running from danger, so malefems as a whole avoid dangerous, responsible situations. But they cleverly turn this disadvantage to their advantage. The same open-ended clothing allows easy access to parts of the leg and thigh that are a particular joy to the fem. Since from earliest childhood malefems have felt their contribution is in *supporting* the fem, this is a system that works very well. One thing only tends to disrupt such systems: a healthy individual.

We will see how such a society perpetuates itself throughout the troubled life of this one healthy individual . . . We trust our proposed world is an apparent contradiction to reality only in the way a mirror-image, in its perfect reverse, is an apparent contradiction to reality. And that by turning "reality" upside-down, the very engines of its foibled existence can be seen in motion.

We begin at the beginning: with our children, our myths and our idea of God — in the Sunday School classroom



Eve's Garden

The following scene is from a skit by Jean Gralley, presented October 9th in Boston at the Northeast District Conference. The theme of the conference, which was planned by women of the district, was Inclusive Theology

"Children" and the Sunday School Teacher (hereafter SST), a malefem, enter and take their places, singing with great enthusiasm:

JOYFUL JOYFUL WE ADORE THEE
GOD OF GLORY, LORD OF LOVE
HEARTS WOULD LIKE FLOWERS
BEFORE THEE
OPENING TO THE SUN ABOVE!
GOD OUR MOTHER
CHRIST OUR SISTER
ONWARD SINCE THE WORLD
BEGAN:
MOTHERLOVE IS REIGNING O'ER
US
SISTERLOVE BINDS FEM TO FEM!

SST (*turning over flap of very large pad at center of "classroom"*) Welcome girls — and boys! That was just wonderful! Now let's all read this together —

ALL "WE-ARE-ALL-ONE-IN-THE-FAM-I-LY-OF-FEM-KIND"!!

SST Yes, that's very good. Now can anyone tell me what it means? (*Hands go up*) Yes, Jessica . . .

1st GIRL (*standing*) It means God is our Mother and Christ is our Sister.

SST Alright, that's a good start. But there's more, isn't there (*Hands are waving*). Who knows what else? Debby?

2nd GIRL (*standing*) It also means that if Christ is the Daughter of God and we live our lives the way Christ would, we can be daughters of God, too!

ADAM is looking out into the audience uneasily.

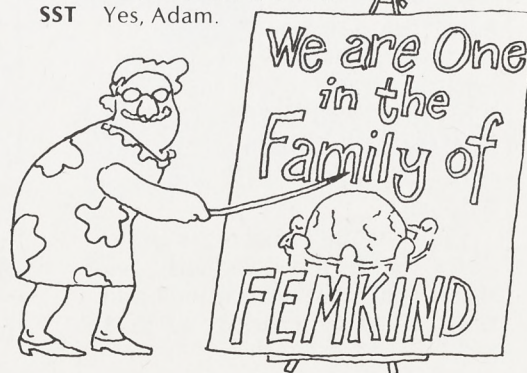
SST That's what Christ promised us, didn't she? If we treat each other with — (*coaxing*) what kind of love? (*Scratching of heads, noisy thinking-sounds*) Come on now . . . (*Hands! Hands!*) AL-TO-GETHER —!

ALL SIS-TER-LY Love!!

SST Right! We treat each person as if she were our very own sister. Then we truly belong to the family of Fem-kind!

ADAM (*raises hand*) Uh . . .

SST Yes, Adam.





ADAM (standing) Uh, I-uh, feel a little... well, funny.

2nd GIRL You look funny. (Class titters)

ADAM I don't want sisterly love... I'm a malefem.

Class hoots and snickers as ADAM quickly sits down.

SST (a bit patronizingly) No, now quiet down. That's a very — good, a very sincere question, Adam. But let me remind you that the Bible says, "And God created them, Fem and Male-fem She created them"... So you see, when we say "Femkind" we mean everybody. God created us both. She cares for us in just the same ways.

ADAM But we're not the same!

Class groans at his persistence. One girl turns to him, "Sit on it".

SST That may well be, "we're not the same" — but let's look back to the time our Creator fashioned us. She fashioned us differently because She had some very different, wonderful plans for us. Now who would like to read the Creation Story for us? Let's look at God's plan...

2nd GIRL (standing, she reads from the "Bible") "In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the Earth. And the Earth was without form and void... And God said, Let us make Fems in our image, after our likeness, and we'll give them DOMINION over all the Earth. So God created Fem in Her own image, in the image of God created She her... And after the MotherGod formed Fem, She created every beast and fowl and brought them all unto Fem. And whatever the Fem called each, that was its name forevermore... And the MotherGod said, It is not good that the Fem should be alone; I will make a little helper for her. And She caused a deep sleep to come upon Fem and out of her belly She took a different creature and brought him unto her. And the Fem said, I will call him Male-fem, for out of the Fem he did come. And so it was decreed from that first day that the malefem should always come out of the Fem. For in her own image did the MotherGod create Fem."

ADAM (raises his hand)... uh-

SST Yes, Adam...

ADAM (standing) Doesn't this go onto the story of the Bush of Knowledge? And how they weren't supposed to eat of it?

SST Yes, Adam...

ADAM And how the malefem caused all the trouble when he disobeyed the MotherGod?

SST Yes, Adam...

ADAM And how it all happened because he was enticed by the Throbbing Donut Monster? Which is probably sexual symbolism —

SST (alarmed!) ADAM!

ADAM (faster) — And is forever exiled from Paradise and has to suffer hard labor and involuntary swelling —

SST ADAM!! We all KNOW the STORY!! (More composed.) Now. Do you HAVE a QUESTION.

ADAM Yeah. Wasn't this also written by FEMS? Only fems?

SST (unsure, cautious) That is essentially correct...

ADAM Well? Don't you see any connections?... Don't they obviously have their own interests in mind?

The class TSKS loudly, turning around, shocked, annoyed, glaring.

SST (indignant) I don't know WHAT you're driving at, young malefem, but I assure you the Bible is written by INSPIRED fems!

2nd GIRL (standing) BY GOD HERSELF!

1st BOY (standing) FEMS INSPIRED BY GOD!! (He starts to sit down, glaring at ADAM as if he were an embarrassment to their sex. His attitude is 'I'm a malefem and even I know he's stupid.' After a moment's thought, this boy student straightens again and taunts loudly:) Whatsa matter? Don't you LIKE fems?

Piano immediately to Faith of Our Fathers. End of Scene One.

Mother Eagle Press plans to publish the skit in its entirety, including the last two scenes, "Dating Game" and "The Shrink".

continued from pg. 5

It's the necessity to be open to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. If history teaches nothing else, it clearly illuminates the frailty of human nature and our very limited ability to recognize the presence of evil, whether it be incarnated in slavery, Nazism, or gay oppression. If the greatest minds in the world could not see it until it slapped them in the face, what makes us think that we will fare any better? To what kinds of evil are we blind? How close to the edge of self-imposed tragedy are we walking at this very moment?

It is obvious that, on our own, we simply cannot avoid becoming party to terrible errors in judgment that future readers of history will condemn as harshly as we condemn slavery, Nazism, and homophobia. God recognizes our inherent deficiencies in judgment and moral perception and compensates us with the embuing of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel of John, Jesus speaks of this great gift:

... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Thus, it is by the leadings of the Holy Spirit that we will be able to gain the necessary critical perspective on the world in which we live. As gay people, perhaps we see a bit more clearly than heterosexuals some of the shortcomings of our culture, simply because we have been forced outside the mainstream. But are we equally able to see our own shortcomings — as individuals and as an emerging community? Are we really able to recognize what is "good" about being gay and what is not? Do we perceive the seeds of evil as clearly as we recognize the points of virtue in our sexual orientation? Are we willing to learn from history? Are we truly receptive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit? We must be, if the idea offered to us 200 years ago is to continue to serve us — and our nation — as an inspired goal.

Howard Wells is pastor of Metropolitan Community Church, Atlanta, and a frequent contributor to *The Gay Christian*.

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more, they have judged it according to standards which make it stand out as something very separate in human behaviour.

Jesus breaks radically with this perception. By his action, sexuality has the name and terror removed from it, and it takes its place as another aspect of humanness to be dealt with and judged with the same objectivity as all other human behaviour.

Jesus does not place the abuse of sexuality in a special category requiring special condemnation.

One of the explicit Gospel encounters involving sexuality is the confrontation of Jesus with the woman taken in adultery. In this narrative, the threatening power of sexuality is reflected. It shows how the free expression of sexuality was perceived as a threat to the community far out of proportion to its importance. It was so threatening that it needed to be dealt with by ritually sanctioned violence and death.

Jesus handled this situation in the same way he handled all questions of justice and rightness. He said, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." When they all left, Jesus said, "Is there no one left to condemn you? I do not condemn you either . . . go and sin no more." (John 8:1-11)

In this situation Jesus dealt with the laws governing sexual behaviour in the same way he handled the question of the observance of the rules of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

The unique emphasis of MCC is dealing with human sexuality openly and honestly as Jesus did. Instead of repressing, denying, or hiding sexuality, MCC follows the pattern of Jesus and puts it on a par with other aspects of humanness.

MCC realizes that God fully intended for human beings to be human and sexual and that sexuality should be an integral part of the wholeness of a fully human person.

Thus MCC attempts to de-fuse the tension caused by relegating sexuality to a separate realm. This leaves room for redirecting the

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of
theological
reflection
from Metropolitan
Community Church

THE GAY CHRISTIAN is the theological journal of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Individual articles reflect the thoughts and opinions of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the doctrinal position or official policy of the UFMCC.

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Special thanks to Dave Stryker of MCC Boston, MA whose Xanadu Graphics assisted with the typesetting.

energy thus saved into efforts for the responsible use of sexuality, as Jesus did. Thus it is not, "be-gone sinner," but, "Go, and sin no more."

Putting a lot of energy into suppressing one area of life impedes the liberation of the whole person. There, we consider that de-fusing tension in the area of sexuality will result in release of immense amounts of energy for living a fully Christian life. It will at the same time lead to liberation from the compulsion to establish rigid, legalistic rules and boundaries in other areas such as dogma and morals in general, where aggressive "righteousness" and "judgmentalism" now often prevail.

2. Human sexuality has been MCC's point of entry into our mission, but what does our sexuality have to do with our Christianity?

We recognize that sexuality is an essential aspect of our personhood, an aspect that cannot be ignored or separated from the rest of our humanness. By this MCC is emphasizing that we cannot find spiritual, mental, or physical wholeness unless we deal affirmatively with our sexuality.

But, our sexuality is not and should not be the focal point of our lives. An important emphasis of the Christian ministry of MCC is that everything in our life, including our sexuality, must center on our relationship with God through

faith in Jesus the Christ. MCC emphasizes that sexuality is part of the whole self which is called into a relationship with God who is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustaining Spirit.

3. In carrying out its mission, MCC emphasizes the Gospel message in unique ways that bring a new credibility to God for many people who once felt estranged from a "Policeman in the Sky" type of God. MCC emphasizes a God who accepts, a God who cares, a God who makes self-acceptance possible.

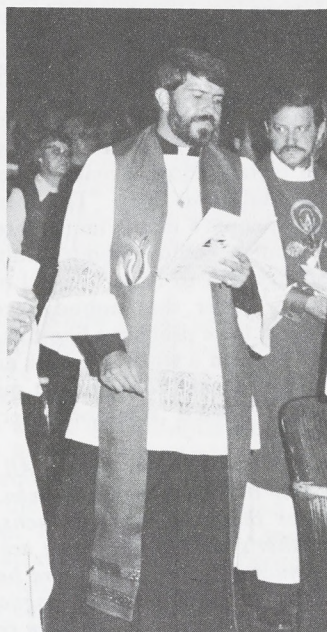
This ministry places a unique emphasis on God's love for everyone, for this is a God who does not discriminate — this is a God who first loved us.

This God becomes relevant in the Jesus who related to Samaritans (foreigners), women (who were considered inferior), lepers (social outcasts), sinners (supposedly rejected by God), and other rejected elements of society.

MCC preaches that God loves and accepts all, not "God loves you if . . ." MCC does not put an "if" or a "but" on God's love.

God loves us regardless of what we are or are not. We need to love the uniqueness, difference of others as God loves us, despite, or perhaps because of, our differences. We need, therefore, to love others because of what they are and what they are not.

God Has Called Us— God Has Spoken—



The Message Is Clear—

The theme of our General Conference this year has been "Proclaim Liberation in the Land." All of our ministers, all of our laity, everyone who has been involved in this Conference has pressed home, again and again, that theme.

You know, I'm so thankful because God is here. I told you this morning I felt the Lord. As I've said, "I'm thankful that we have proclaimed liberation in the land, starting last Tuesday morning until this afternoon when we met in the park across the street from the White House, I was delighted. Not just Americans, but people from around the world who were there, too, to proclaim liberation in the land and to say we have a right to exist in every society around this world, and we won't sell our birthright, but we'll stand fast. I'm so thankful because everybody has been involved in proclaiming this week "Liberation in the Land." I haven't met anyone who hasn't. Everybody has been worshipping God and proclaiming that message. I'm so thankful when I think that the UFMCC is a part of proclaiming liberation in the land.

I'm thankful that if we read the Word of God we find that we who are gay are also included and it really tied in to what I wanted to say tonight. And I remembered as I was reading, I was thinking about one of the prophets that John Hose, the Vice Moderator of the Board of Elders, mentioned tonight, the prophet Isaiah. I don't know if you've ever read the Book of Isaiah, but if you haven't, I hope you will.

The prophet Isaiah was one of those people that God called to speak to his generation, but not just to his generation, but to our generation, also. As a Christian, I believe that these words are just as fresh today as they have ever been.

I don't look at the Word of God as being anything dead, that you can't use in the 20th century. I believe the Word of God is alive and well and living in our day and age, too. I read the Book of Isaiah, and I got to thinking about that prophet, Isaiah, who was one of the most eloquent of all the prophets in the written Word of the entire Scriptures. The prophet Isaiah stood up and talked not only about this day, but talked about the coming of Jesus Christ; the birth, the divinity, the ministry, the death and the second coming as well as the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. And yet that man didn't live to see Jesus, but he knew the truth of God and believed without hesitation what God said. When I look at the Scriptures, I think of how Isaiah speaks to us.

Something was brought home to me. Yesterday, when Dr. John Boswell was speaking to us at the Church, as I sat and listened to him, all at once something hit me like a ton of bricks. I think sometimes in MCC it's hard for us to proclaim liberation in the land, because we still haven't accepted our place in history and what God has done for us. I think as the Church of Jesus Christ we have to come to terms with our place in history.

And as Dr. Boswell spoke, I heard something that just curled my hair. And I remembered, eight years ago . . . and you've all read my story. I'm not going to get into that . . . I remember something happened to me. The Lord spoke to my heart, and as God gave me the assurance that God loved me, God told me to do one thing, and that was to go back and to start again rereading the Word of God . . . see what the Word said.

And I remember I started rereading that Word, and it wasn't long before I started MCC, and it wasn't long before we had all kinds of coverage about MCC in the press . . . and then on radio programs, television programs, talk shows, that something happened. The Lord showed me something, and I didn't have any-

thing to back it up, but I knew that God had spoken to my heart, and God had told me one thing. God had given me an assurance that for 400 years, and I've said this so many, many times, there were gay people in the early Church. For 400 years . . . God gave me that figure, and I didn't know why. And I remember I used to get on those talk shows and I'd say, "I defy anyone to tell me differently. There were gay people in the early Church of the Lord Jesus Christ for the first 400 years."

And I'd always end up with some minister or someone who thought they were just a little smarter than God, and they would say, "Well, give me these statistics, show me that, prove that to me." And I would say to them, "I can't show you. I don't have any historical facts, but I know what God told me. And God told me there were people in that early Church, and I don't care whether the statistics come out while I'm alive, or not. I know there were gay people there."

And yesterday when John spoke from the pulpit and all at once said, "for 400 to 450 years in the early Church, there were gay men and women. There are letters that provide the proof that there were homosexuals in the early Church," I knew then and there God gave me a witness of what the Lord had shown to me, and let me know then and there never to apologize to anybody when God gives you something to give to people.

It's time for us to proclaim Liberation in the Land, time for us to tell the world we belong. It's time for us to understand our history. In the Old Testament there were people who had no part whatsoever in temple worship. People who were told they could not belong. These were people who were not born into the Jewish faith. They were strangers or foreigners who came into the country, and they were not a part of Israel, and were told they could not worship. If they were individuals who had been converted to the Jewish religion, there was a court into which they could enter. But the Word of God said that they could not go into the temple itself. The same was true of another group of individuals, but for a different reason . . . the barren. While they were not forbidden to enter the temple, they were constantly scrutinized by their neighbors, because in Jewish tradition you were to have children. John Boswell touched on that yesterday, and I sat and listened to him, again the Holy Spirit just checked me. And oh, if you were a woman and you were barren, it was horrible. It was terrible. If you were a man, and you didn't want to have children, or you couldn't have children, or you refused to marry, you were despised even more. There was a third group and they were called eunuchs. And the eunuchs were usually thought of as individuals who were castrated and who usually were owned by the royal household or by some rich person. But again, they were not to enter the House of God. They were rejected.

And I believe with all of my heart that probably there were gays in those days and they were treated like the eunuchs. They were people who didn't bear children; and therefore, according to the religious leaders of that day, there was something wrong with them. But one day Isaiah stood up, and even though Jewish custom did not change at that time, that prophet stood up in the middle of Jerusalem and prophesied and said, (IS 56: 1-8):

Thus saith the Lord. Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my slaving is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.

2. Blessed are they that doeth this, and the children of them that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth their hand from doing any evil.

3. Neither let the children of the stranger, that hath joined themselves to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from my people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.

4. For this saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant:

5. Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

6. Also the children of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve the Lord, and to love the name of the Lord, to be the Lord's servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant;

7. Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

8. The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to God, beside those that are gathered unto God.

"I say to you, my gay brothers and sisters, you were included in God's plan." I say to you on God's authority that the Lord spoke through Isaiah to all sexual minorities when he used the word eunuch. God was not speaking to just castrated males, but to gay people as well. God provided us a name better than the names of sons and daughters.

Then the skeptic who would say to me, "Can you show me something in the New Testament to support your belief?" Well, I want you to turn to Matthew, the 19th Chapter. Jesus was having a conversation one day about adultery, and everyone was very concerned and upset because Jesus mentioned that if you looked upon a woman to lust after her in your heart, you had committed adultery already. You didn't have to have any type of penetration to her than with your mind. And then He went on to talk about women, who were put away for adultery by men, and Jesus said, "The men are adulterers, too." And that blew people's minds immediately because up to that point only a woman could commit adultery in Scripture. And then the disciples said to Him, "Now Lord, this is very, very strange. Maybe it's better that nobody ever gets married than to get married and have problems like this, because we all wander with our eyes once in a while. We look around, and, oh God, if we're going to be in that condition, it might be bad to be married." And Jesus quoted something very, very strange. (Matthew 19: 11-12):

11. But he said unto them. All people cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

12. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born, from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. They that are able to receive it, let them receive it.

I want to say to you Christians right now, God has given this Church a revelation, and it's that God loves all people. And in Matthew, the 19th Chapter, the 12th verse where I've just read, Jesus was not talking about castration. Jesus was talking about a group of people, and that group of people were you and I who sit in this building right now. And He said that marriage in the traditional style was not for all people, but for those that it was not meant for, let them understand that they, too, could be a part of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You're getting awfully quiet out there and maybe you think I've lost my mind, but I want to tell you something. I'm telling you the truth tonight, as the Lord gave it to me. In this Fellowship, we have to proclaim liberation in the land. But to do that, we have to know who and what we are. We have to realize and know that God has called us, not a thousand other people, but you and me. I want to tell you this. God has called us to come out and to be a separate people in this day and this age. A peculiar people, a royal priesthood, and if we do that, we can really proclaim liberty throughout the land. We're called out. But to be called out, we have to be trained.

I listened to Reverend Sandmire's message this morning, and I thought about it, and I prayed about it, and I want to tell you something right now. We must be strong people. It's time for our ministers to preach the meat of the Word, and not just the milk. And I'm not going to attack our ministers because some of our people, every time our ministers start preaching the meat of the word, half the church gets upset and goes running off, because they get tore up and upset. But God expects this Church to stand on its own feet. I want to tell you right now. God just

doesn't want any ineffective, mealy-mouth, sickly, tiddy-baby Christians. God wants strong people in this Fellowship who can stand on their own feet to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God wants people who can stand up and do battle with Satan. And hearing my sister talk about that group in Riverside, CA, and I don't know the cause of that fire, none of us do, but I want to tell you something. As Frank Kameny said today, the persecution might be on its way. I want to know that we can stand and we can stand tall. It may not get better. It may get worse. But I want to tell you this right now, that if tomorrow something happens to all of us, if we have to sign with our blood, our testimony, it'll be worth it all when we meet God someday on the other side. No one's going to keep us out of the Kingdom. When MCC learns that it IS the Church of God, then and only then will we be able really to proclaim Liberation in the Land.

Today I was sort of disappointed. I looked out at the group at the park and so many of you weren't there. I know the feelings of many of our ministers and our laity about Christian Social Action. Some people think we really shouldn't have it in the church. But I'm going to tell you something. God is on the throne. If people are suffering, we have to bring relief, and we can't bring relief if we don't do the work God has called us to do. It'll be easy for us to become the fashionable group. You know, last Friday night, when I stood on top of the Lincoln Memorial, and I looked down, and I saw over 1,000 people moving across the street, and up the steps, all at once the power of the Lord came upon me. And it reminded me of another time, and I've never shared this with anyone except eight really close friends of mine . . .

I went on a bike run. I don't know if you've ever been on a bike run, or not. Jim Sandmire this morning mentioned a bike run. It was a lot of fun. None of the horrible things that I'd heard that goes on during bike runs went on. I enjoyed myself. I had a good time. It was in a part of California called Badger Flat in the High Sierra. Oh, it was so beautiful. And this was two years ago. I was going through a crisis point in my life. And I'd prayed and I had asked the Lord to help me, and I didn't know where to look for help. There are times . . . sometimes you become so burdened that even your closest friends can't help you. I think I know what Job talks about in the Old Testament. Your friends can believe, but sometimes even they don't understand. And I was that way, just tore up inside, twisted, and my stomach was in knots. And I remember that night, I couldn't go to sleep. I walked up into the hills, finally came back down, sat around, listened to music for awhile, and then decided to go to bed. Terry Luton, from the Los

Angeles Church, was with me in the same tent. And I went into that tent, and I lay down, and I went to sleep. And all at once I had a very bad dream. I thought I was going through one of our famous California earthquakes. I woke up and found I had kicked the covers off and I was shivering from the night wind, and that's what evidently evoked the dream. I pulled the covers up, and a second time I had the same dream. And that time I really zipped into the bag, pulled the covers up, covered my head, and closed my eyes. All at once I was in the brightest of lights, and there was a personage standing in front of me. And through all my excitement the person spoke to me and said,

"Prophecy, O child of God.

The Lord God has annointed you.

Preach the truth.

Preach what you have been shown and prophecy."

At that time I didn't tell Terry Luton anything at all about it. I went to another person who was at the campground and I shared with them and I said, "Something happened last night. I want to tell you about it, and I don't know what to do about it." And I shared with that person who's a witness and attending this Conference. And I went up in the woods and I prayed. And I want to tell you something. Since that moment, in some ways, I've been more bold than I've ever been, because I know what God said to me that moment. And I know how you look at people when they tell you stories like that. I do. I think, "Oh God, somebody stopped by McDonald's last night, or they've been eating too many refried beans and, good Lord, you know, they really have a problem." That happens.

On Friday night, when I stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, I looked down. All at once I wept. And I thought, "Oh God, how I love you. I feel and then see that angel standing here now again." I started thinking about Washington, DC — this big city which is the seat of power of the American government. And I thought back to almost six years ago when a brother, Paul Breton, wrote me in Los Angeles, CA and said, "we have a little group of Christians meeting here. We call ourselves the Washington Community Church, and we want to be a part of MCC. Would you come and visit with us and take us in, and preach for us." And I said, "Sure, Paul." I came here. And I'll never forget. Paul and I started to the Episcopal church where I was to preach. We arrived there and discovered we had been locked out. Paul had announced he was going to perform a service of Holy Union for a couple in that church. The papers had mentioned it, and the Episcopal bishop in this city had said, "No such ceremony will take place." He told the pastor of that church, but he never called us. We would have moved the Holy Union to some other place had we known it would offend the bishop. But he didn't pay us the courtesy of letting us know. He called the pastor of that church and said, "I don't want them in there." The pastor said, "Well, I do." The bishop said, "I'm invoking Canon Law and taking that decision out of your hands. The doors will be locked on the church."

Jehovah your God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
"Yet will I gather others . . . besides those who are gathered."

Isaiah 56:8



When we arrived at that little building, it was in 23-degree weather. I'll never forget it. There were 17 people in front of that little church, and everybody was freezing to death. We had more reporters than we had members there, but we moved right over to the side of the building. I preached. I only preached for ten minutes, but I thought my jaws would fall off, it was so cold. Paul and I consecrated Communion, and our people came up and knelt in the snow and took Communion. When they finished, the reporters said, "Whar are you going to do now?" I said, "We're going to the National CAthedral to hold a pray-in for the bishop of the Episcopal Church." I remember we got into our cars, and only eight people went with us out of the group of 17. Paul and I walked into that big cathedral and started walking down the aisle. All at once there was someone in front of me in a collar — all smiles — a young person, and he said, "Are you Troy Perry? I'm an Episcopal seminary student." I said, "That's great."

He waid, "Whar are you here for?" "We're here to pray for your bishop." "For what?" he wanted to know. "Because he had us locked out of the church downtown," I replied. He said, "Well, would you like to have the high altar? I have the key. I'll open the gate for you." That young seminary student was Jack Isbell, who now is pastor of MCC, DC. He opened the gate to that high altar, and we walked up to it boldly — the reporters falling all over each other. There were many tourists in the Cathedral. There had been a funeral a few minutes before we arrived. One of the founders of AA had passed away. His funeral had just taken place, but as is typical, because the National Cathedral is a tourist attraction, there were hundreds of other people in the building. I knelt and started praying in my booming voice. Everybody stopped and many took out their rosaries and started praying with me as I was praying. And all at once, I said, "God, I want you to cure this bishop right now of his homophobia, and help us to set homosexuals free right now." And I could hear rosaries dropping all over the floor as if the people had had heart attacks and felt God there. I'm telling you, I never emptied a building so fast in all of my life.

All I'm trying to say, MCC, is this, That was six years ago. I'm afraid sometimes in MCC today, that we're so hung up about who we are and what we're doing here, that if that opportunity came today, if we were locked out, we would probably say, "Well, let's not do anything now, my goodness gracious, after all, we don't want anybody to get upset." I see us becoming very comfortable.

I'm delighted we're buying buildings. Praise God! Don Eastman the pastor of our church in Des Moines, IA, walked up to me. They are a young group. I think they started about two years ago. They are talking about buying a church. And I thank

God for that. The LA Church . . . I look on it with such pride. I want you to look at this . . . This piece of property, if it had to be built today, we're told by engineers, would cost over \$1,000,000 to replace. You can't build buildings like that anymore. I'm delighted.

But if we're going to proclaim liberation in the land, then we have to realize that the torch that touched everyone of our hearts, in realizing that God loves us, can't be quenched by our decadence of trying to be too accepting of everything and everybody who wants to accept us everywhere in this whole wide world. I want to join the National Council of Churches . . . if we don't have to compromise our stand for what we believe in.

In this General Conference we have affirmed the programs of this church. We have affirmed the need of institutional ministries, innovative ministries, ministries to all types of persons. We have the tools with which to work. We have the tools that have been given to us by God. But I say to you, my brothers and sisters, right now, if we lose the Spirit in this church, if all we have are a bunch of programs without the Holy Spirit, we might as well write "Ichabod" over the door and close the Fellowship down tomorrow. Somehow we have to reach out and make sure that the Holy Spirit is revitalized daily in our hearts and in our lives by putting ourselves on the line, by using good common sense, but never, ever, backing away, from evil and wrong.

I think it's honestly time for us to bow our heads and say "Alright God. This is the 7th Conference, that magical number of seven . . . completion . . . We have finished the cycle. We have come to this part of our history. We're at that place now where you are calling us to be true to the vision that you have given us. That vision is to teach and to preach that you love all people right where they're at.

Sisters and Brothers, if we get in our minds that we don't have to do the ministry that we've done in the past, that we've become so popular that there's no need for us anymore in the area where our people congregate in this world, we've lost the battle. All at once, we become the new oppressor. If our people make up their minds, that, "Well, bless God, I am what I am. I just don't feel comfortable with these people; so therefore, we're going to have MCC of the Rich, MCC for the Poor will be down the street, MCC for Blacks can be over there, MCC for Women can be there." I want to tell you now, God will withdraw that Holy Power from us as a body, and we will become just another dead movement to a past revival.

God has called us. God has spoken. The message is clear. God had appointed us not to be a divided body, but a whole body, and it's our responsibility to be that. Amen. ●

November Elder's Meeting

The board of elders held their November meeting in Los Angeles in the Fellowship offices during the week of November 1-5.

The first two days were spent with all the district coordinators from the U.S. Districts. (Listed p.4)

They prayed together, shared reports, discussed common procedures, and worked together to build up the work of the Lord.

The board of elders established a new district in the United States, dividing the huge, wide-spread Southeast District into two districts.

The Southeast District will consist of congregations in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.

The new Mid Atlantic District will consist of congregations in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

The elders set dates and places for ministers conferences on the east and west sections of the United States.

The western conference will be held near Los Angeles at Cotton-tail ranch in the Malibu Mountains, hosted by MCC Long Beach. The ranch was the site of the

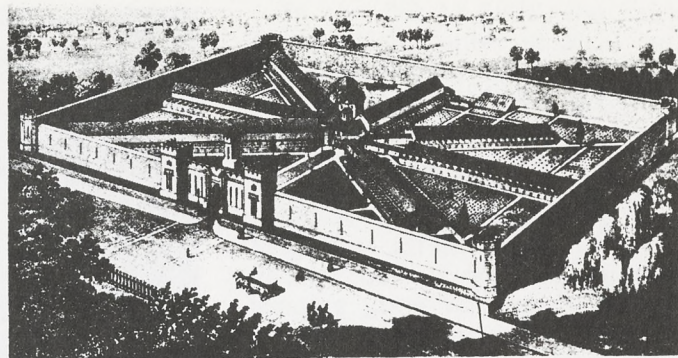
spring retreat of the southwest district in 1976. The western ministers conference begins on Friday noon, January 21, 1977.

The eastern conference will be held near Tampa, FL at Lake Bird Lodge at Avon Park, hosted by MCC Tampa. The lodge was the site of the 1976 spring retreat of the southeast district conference. The eastern conference begins on Friday noon, March 18, 1977.

A discussion program for the conferences will be presented by the Christian Education Commission and the Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission. ●

THE CELLMATE

Continued from page 22



Rev. Joseph Gilbert Takes Part In National Criminal Justice Strategy

by The Rev. Joseph H. Gilbert

(Rev. Gilbert, first director of MCC's national prison ministry, served two years in that capacity. He is presently serving as National Advisor to the Board of Institutional Ministry, as well as pastoring in Providence and Worcester. In October he participated in the New York meeting of the powerful criminal justice task force affiliated with the Joint Strategy and Action Committee of the National Council of Churches of Christ.)

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, through the Board of Institutional Ministry (USA) once again participated in the Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice at its October 5-6 meeting. Three particular areas of concern dealt with were: A National Moratorium on Prison Construction, Decriminalization (of what we call victimless "crimes") and A Resolution on the Death Penalty.

William Nagel, a 20 year veteran in correctional services asserts: "If this country is resolved to do something about the crime problem, the immediate thing it must do is call a halt to the building of new prisons, jails and training schools at least for a time while we plan and develop alternatives." America incarcerates more people per capita than any other freeworld nation. Yet the Federal Bureau of Prisons plans to construct 45 new prisons. Most states are expanding their systems, as counties double their lock-up capabilities, stimulated by new federal monies (LEAA & Revenue Sharing). As Metropolitan Community Churches in the United States begin to develop effective means of ministering within the prisons of that nation, it is important that its members begin to talk about *depopulation* as a real solution to overcrowded prisons.

The Task Force called for a consultation to address questions raised by Decriminalization of Victimless "Crimes." Areas to be addressed in the consultation would be: Can/should morality be legislated? If so, when? What is the relation of "law-making" and "morality"? If law is needed, what kinds of sanctions are most appropriate? What are the implications pluralism for law-making and morality? What is the basis on which society should make laws? What are the values which inform law? What are the values which inform morality? For society? For the religious community?

It seems to this writer that the work of the Task Force is particularly important in the Community MCC has been called out to serve. In April of 1974 the Task Force said: "Criminal law and its procedures should be used as little as possible consonant with the well-being of all people . . . When it is possible to maintain the safety of persons and property by informal moral sanctions, by eliminating tension-producing economic or physical conditions, by preventive engineering and administrative measures, or by tolerance of deviance we regard as undesirable, we generally prefer such measures rather than criminal law and procedure . . ." That will mean the repeal of many laws, an area of real Christian Social Action.

Finally the group passed a strongly worded resolution to pass on to the National Council of Churches for it to promulgate. The resolution points out: "It was the conviction of the U.S. Supreme Court that existing standards of

decency make acceptable the reinstitution of the death penalty and that, in fact, society needs the death penalty to express its moral outrage at the commission of certain heinous crimes." But the resolution faults the court, saying: "Surely a moral people cannot believe that killing by the state offers any solution to crime. The use of the death penalty gives official sanction to the climate of violence." It quotes from Justice Thurgood Marshall's dissent on July 2, 1976: ". . . the American people, fully informed as to the purposes of the death penalty and its liabilities, would in my view reject it as morally unacceptable."

The Task Force and the National Council of Churches each pledges to work closely . . . with religious bodies in resisting the reenactment and administration of death penalty statutes. Metropolitan Community Churches in the United States need to join that effort.

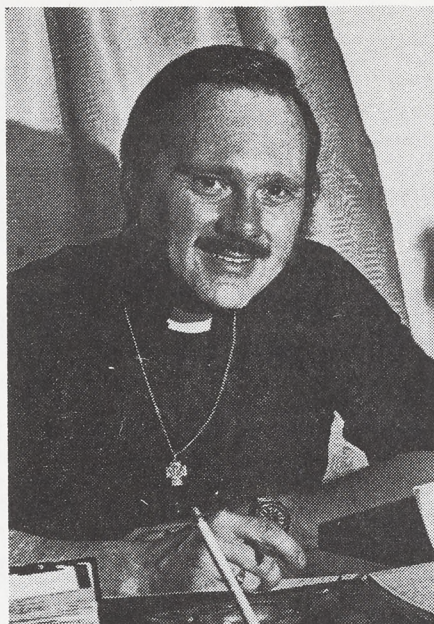
Prisoner's Yellow Pages Available

The Board of Institutional Ministry (USA) of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches announces the availability of the summer 1976 edition of the PRISONERS YELLOW PAGES; a national directory of Prisoner support groups.

This edition contains 751 listings including Law Libraries Which Offer Services To Prisoners, and is believed to be the most comprehensive directory of its kind.

The PRISONERS YELLOW PAGES is free to prisoners and is available to

non-prisoners for \$2.00. As there is only a limited supply, orders will be filled on a first come-first serve basis with Prisoners taking priority. Requests for the PRISONERS YELLOW PAGES should be sent: Yellow Pages, c/o Universal Fellowship Press, POB 5570, Los Angeles, CA 90055 and all checks should be made out to Universal Fellowship Press. "We have an active ministry in 96 institutions," said Rev. Bob Arthur, National Administrator, "and both Prisoners and Prisoner support groups are finding the Yellow Pages one of their most effective resources."



Th' Parson Goes A Packin'

by The Rev. Bob Arthur

While I was at General Conference, I was pleased with the increased interest shown in Institutional Ministry.

Pastors made nominations to us for Area Representatives, and lay-people volunteered their services for our work. Two people volunteered to help process and continue the correspondence courses that we currently offer to prisoners. We obtained an Area Representative in Washington, DC who is employed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. And as the week went by, several churches asked if I would visit with them about the work of Institutional Ministry. So the following is a kind of travelogue of those visits.

First of all, Rev. Jack Isbell has been conducting services in the Rockville, MO county jail and was recently denied permission to continue. He went to visit the superintendent of the jail, and had a good discussion with him, ending with a promise of renewed permission to conduct services for inmates as soon as their current building project is completed allowing for much more room for such things. I stayed through the Wednesday following Conference in Washington and spoke to their mid-week service about the work of Institutional Ministry. They took a collection and flew me to Omaha, the next church on my schedule.

Of course, since Omaha was my home for the last three years, I was happy to be able to visit with many friends there, and to speak at their Sunday worship service. The work there is growing both in the church and in their institutional ministry outreach. Deacon John Wilds, our Area Representative

there, has been faithful in correspondence and has increased the number of prisoners being served there in the short time he has been our Area Representative there. The congregation also took up a collection for me that was sufficient to fly me to Denver, my next destination.

I always enjoy visiting with the people of Denver, and their pastor Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart. True to form, they treated me nicely while I was there, and gave me their Wednesday night pulpit. I spoke to the needs of Institutional Ministry and had several people afterwards speak to me about getting involved. Currently, we have no Area Representative there, but Rev. Frank Murr, secretary to Rev. Arehart, is trying to coordinate the work by developing interest in Institutional Ministry and training any who are interested in working with us. I expect we will soon have an Area Representative there.

From Denver, I flew to Phoenix (with the help of the Denver congregation), where Rev. Frank Crouch and his son Bob hosted me for a week. As soon as I arrived I was asked to stay the whole week so that I could join Rev. Crouch in a visit to our Tucson mission the second Sunday. I was very happy that I did. I spoke at both the morning and evening services in Phoenix, and we were also surprised by a visit by Rev. Dick Mickley, the former National Administrator of Institutional Ministry. The response in Phoenix to Institutional Ministry was also good. Two people to my knowledge spoke with Rev. Crouch about becoming Area Representative. Rev. Crouch will be working towards

training them and we hope to soon have an Area Representative there, too. I had never been in Phoenix before, and thrilled with the fantastic hospitality that was shown me by everyone there. I had a beautiful week of reading and relaxation, something which I have not had for some time. At the end of the week we went to Rev. Al DeLabio's final service in Tucson, and had the privilege of meeting some of the leaders in that group as well. One of their members spoke to me about an interest in prison work, and bought a *PRISON MINISTRY HANDBOOK* to study. He said he would be in contact with me in the near future about working with us. I am, therefore, looking forward to an Area Representative in Tucson soon, too.

All in all, I feel the month I spent away from the office was well worth the time. The ministry of Institutional Ministry is growing, and our services are becoming more effective. At the present time we now have a work in 96 prisons around the country, and it is growing all the time. Praise the Lord!

THE MICHIGAN LAWSUIT

Rev. Heather Anderson, MCC chaplain to the prisoners at Southern Michigan Prison at Jackson, reports that a new lawyer is proceeding with gusto on the MCC lawsuit which arises out of the refusal of the Department of Corrections and prison officials to permit Rev. Anderson to minister to prisoners without harassment and delay, without retaliatory treatment of prisoners who seek the ministry of the church.

Rev. Anderson learned of the "reasons" for the decision of the Department of Corrections to deny religious services from reading about it in the newspaper. "Such services would result in homicides and assaults, romantic triangles, jealousy and rivalry, rape, intimidation, extortion, personal and psychological debilitation of the victims."



Reverend Troy Perry is the one who first thought about an article for IN UNITY dealing with Newt Deiter. "It is high time we gave recognition to the work Newt is doing in MCC and in the gay community," he said, "he has given generously of his head and his heart. Our church is better for it."

The first time I saw Newt Deiter was at a meeting serving the gay community. That was over five years ago. The last time I saw Newt Deiter was at a meeting serving the gay community. That was last week. This is typical of a guy who is so involved in gay causes that he sometimes hardly has time for his own private practice. Deiter is a clinical psychologist in Los Angeles.

Merely listing his areas of activities takes a lot of typewriter ribbon:

Political: Serves on City Attorney, Bert Pines' committee drawing up the Democratic Party's

Legal Crime planks.

Radio-TV: Helped create and serves the Gay Media Task Force, advising on treatment of gay themes. His name is frequently in the national news media in connection with accomplishments of the Task Force.

Counseling: Devotes one afternoon a week to the peer-counseling program at the Gay Community Services Center.

Community: Appointed to City Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson's Revitalize Hollywood Task Force.

Newspapers: Writes a column for the *Advocate*.

Law Enforcement: Advisor to the Sheriff of San Francisco County.

Business: Co-owner of a gay bar in Los Angeles "The Headquarters."

Religion: Works on several levels advising and helping MCC-LA. Received MCC LA's first "Pastor's Award" in October 1976.

The foregoing isn't by any means a complete listing of Newt's interests — just a sampling. Let's look in depth at his work at MCC.

In the fall of 1972, the Crisis Intervention Center at MCC was conducting a lay counsellor training program. Deiter was asked for some professional input. He began meeting once a month with counsellors to discuss their problems. It was the beginning of a long love affair. Once a month became once a week. Counsellor training grew to include hotline training. The Pastor soon sought him for his advice. It wasn't long before he was involved in activities relating to exhorters, the deaconate, Samaritan Theological Institute, and the Prison Ministry.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Deiter is not a member of MCC (he is Jewish), nor does he hold any official position. But, there is no more trusted, respected friend of MCC. Experience has often demonstrated the value of his counsel and it is frequently sought not only by ministers but by many lay members in need of advice. "I don't know how he does it," one pastor wondered, "but, he always finds the time some how." What does make Newt run?

Man Of Many Talents: Dr. Newt Deiter

by J. Moriarity



Photo by Lee Young

The answer is in the sort of a person Newt Deiter is. An interviewer, visiting him in his Hollywood hilltop home feels like he is interviewing some kind of perpetual-motion machine. One of his sources of strength is his understanding lover, Tom Morton. Tom is Newt's foundation, his fortress, that keel which keeps the ship level. Their relationship is loving, beautiful. A few vital statistics might help:

Born: New York, of vacationing L.A. Parents

Age: 44

Schooling: Los Angeles area schools, Stanford and University of Chicago. B.A., M.A. and Ph.D., degrees in Clinical Psychology.

Military: Retired. Lt. Col., USAF, Korean War service, Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, 3 Purple Hearts.

These and a great many other accomplishments are noted on a beautiful plaque framed and hanging on the wall of Deiter's comfortable office in the basement of his home, a plaque presented to him by the City of Los Angeles, attesting to his service to the community and signed by an impressive number of Los Angeles city officials. Talking about public service — work in the church, work in the community, work in the areas of gay advancement — the perpetual motion machine is on.

But, there is another side of Newt Deiter. Let one of his counsellors describe him. "I've never known a more supportive friend. Quiet, understanding, helpful, that's Dr. Deiter." Talking with him, it is soon evident that counselling is his *Numero Uno* interest. That is where his major contribution to MCC has been.

Deiter feels that MCC's Crisis Intervention Center Program is an outreach to the non-church community. Let's let him speak for a moment about C.I.C.

"So much needed human contact is best handled on a peer level. That is the need and that is the challenge of our Crisis Intervention Center. Often the caller is making his first contact with Metropolitan Community Church by dialing the hotline number. We must not make the mistake of presenting our hotline as a re-

ligious hotline. The person calling has a personal problem and it should be so treated. Very often it happens that the person calling will become church active at a later date."

Deiter practices what he teaches. He describes his peer-counselling as a journey he and his client take together. He is there every step of the way, no matter what valley of shadows is traversed, helping, supporting and being there.

"A Rock of Gibraltar," says G.C.S.C. Director, Don Kilhefner, who has worked with him at the center. For years Deiter met each Saturday morning with a group of his peer-counsellors for a collective unloading. There was no

chairperson, no agenda, no holds barred. An MCC pastor, an M.D., a social worker, peer counsellors from the church and the Gay Community Services Center were among the regulars.

"Newt always came in bursting to share some counselling experience with us, or drop a problem on us," remembers one of the participants. "He is such a ball of fire usually, it was always good to find that he, too, was a human being, with victories, and failures, strengths and weaknesses, loves and hates. We were lucky to have him."

Anyone at MCC who has crossed paths with Newt Deiter feels that way. •

In Memorium Mrs. Lorraine Roderick



U.S. Army photo

A good friend of MCC people everywhere passed away in September.

Mrs. Robert Roderick, mother of Rev. Tere Ann Roderick, passed away after a long bout with cancer.

The Rev. Troy D. Perry officiated at the memorial service at MCC San Luis Obispo, where Rev. Roderick is pastor. Also attending from Los Angeles were Frank Zerilli, Terry Foster, Chip Garcia, Rev. Robert Arthur, and Rev. Richard Mickley (who was accompanied by his lover's mother Mrs. Antonia Avila). Rev. Virgil Scott, pastor of MCC Ventura, gave the opening invocation.

Mr. and Mrs. Roderick had driven all the way to Washington, DC for General Conference, hoping to attend the Parents of Gays Workshop, but arrived too late.

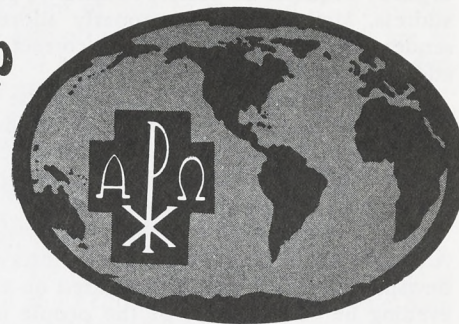
Many in MCC will never forget the frequent trips of both Mr. and Mrs. Roderick to drive Tere and other MCC members to Vacaville prison where Tere was MCC Chaplain and how they have gone to so many other MCC conferences and events.

Just a few months ago Mr. and Mrs. Roderick, who have always been supportive of Tere's ministry, moved to San Luis Obispo to be with her in her ministry in that area where she is pastor of the Study Group and MCC Chaplain at two prisons nearby, San Luis Obispo and Atasca dero.

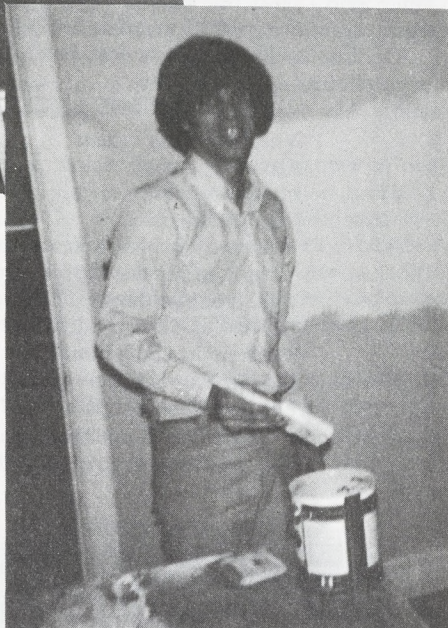
Just a few days before her death, Mrs. Roderick rode with Mr. Roderick and Tere to Spiritual Renewal at Ventura where Rev. Perry was preaching, but was too ill to get out of the car. Rev. Perry recounted how he was moved to tears as he went to the car to pray with this faithful friend of MCC. •

One Faith, One Hope, One Baptism...

News of the Universal Fellowship



Rev. Richard Vincent



UFMCC Board of Elders

Rev. Larry Bernier



Fellowship news is a testimony of the people of MCC and how God is working through the Fellowship and the congregations. Each issue of IN UNITY carries those stories which come to the attention of the Fellowship News editor. Since IN UNITY lacks the resources to send out news gathering reporters, all congregations and work groups of the Fellowship are continuously urged to send news releases, copies of their publications, and special articles to IN UNITY. Photos are always especially welcome.

The international offices of the Universal Fellowship have moved again.

A fifteen room suite on the sixth floor of a downtown Los Angeles office building is now home for the Fellowship administrative offices, Samaritan Theological Institute, Institutional Ministry, Church Services and the Department of Publications. There is room for expansion to more than double its present space, and it looks permanent (God willing and holding off the earthquakes...).

The suite includes offices, meeting rooms, work areas and class rooms for administration and staff of the Fellowship and its theological school.

The staff of Samaritan Theological Institute is listed in another article. The Fellowship Administration and staff whose offices are in the new suite are:

The Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry, Moderator of the Board of Elders;

The Rev. Elder James E. Sandmire, Treasurer and Administrative Elders;

Herb Shannon, Accountant;

The Rev. Paul Breton, Administrative Clerk;

Frank Zirilli, Office Manager;

The Rev. Bob Arthur, National Director of Institutional Ministry;

Norm Flowers, Administrative Assistant, Institutional Ministry

The Rev. Laurence Bernier, Associate Editor of IN UNITY, administrator of the Fellowship Insurance Program and church services, Fellowship Hymnal Editor.

The Rev. Richard R. Mickley, Director of Publications and Editor of IN UNITY.

The new quarters provide ample space for volunteers, such as Terry Foster; and for the work of Typesetting (much of it volunteer) done by Marj Anderson, professional typesetter; for the publications department art and layout work, for shipping, etc.

The work day begins officially at 9:00 at the Fellowship offices. Some of the staff are early birds and start their long day much earlier. But all the Elders and staff are on hand for 8:45 prayer service every morning in the Fellowship suite chapel. A scripture meditation, morning prayer, a time of sharing and prayer for each other's concerns and prayer for the Fellowship gets the day started — in unity in community.

Auckland, New Zealand

MCC Auckland, P.O.B. 3897, Auckland, New Zealand urgently requests all correspondents to please note their correct address. Mail is being improperly addressed and returned to sender. There seems to be an incorrect "10" appearing in the address from an error in a directory.

MCC Auckland is still aglow over the visit of the Rev. Lee J. Carlton, Coordinator of Church Extension in Australia and New Zealand, on his way to General Conference.

IN UNITY regrets we do have photographs of this joyous occasion to share with readers.

Lee arrived on Wednesday, was welcomed royally at the Aquarius Club. Thursday he was interviewed by two of the newspapers and Friday he appeared on two radio shows. In the evening he visited some of the people of the city and got acquainted with some of the leaders of the organizations, and experienced a bomb scare in one club.

Sunday morning Lee "took the sermon" at St. Philip's and a good tape recording was made that the MCC Auckland will treasure for the lonely months ahead. Sunday evening Lee preached for the MCC service. In the words of the editor of the MCC Auckland News (a newsy newsletter), "Rev. Lee's style of preaching is something quite different from what I am used to hearing. The hymns, too, are more conducive to giving gay people a sense of being wanted, being proud of what you are, not ashamed, and above all, of coming to understand that GOD LOVES YOU, HE REALLY, REALLY LOVES each and every-one of you."

"It was a pleasant and memorable visit. He proved a versatile and informed reader and we regret that time was against us sharing more the thoughts that go beyond the bounds of ordinary conversation." ■

(The following article is based on an interview with Peter Hurrock, a member of MCC Auckland, New Zealand, who stopped in Los Angeles on his holiday visit to as many MCC's as possible. He will visit MCC groups in the United Kingdom and across the United States. He has worked two jobs for several months to make this MCC holiday possible. He formerly spent a lot of time and money pursuing his hobby of midget cars and speed racing. Now all his energies are directed toward the Lord's work in MCC.)

The Auckland MCC congregation is eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Rev. Ron Burcham and his companion, Bobby Brown. Ron, now pastor of MCC Kansas City, will depart on November 15 to become the pastor of MCC Auckland.

MCC Auckland has very good counseling and welfare services operating and the members are alert for opportunities to witness. Many of the church people, including Peter, work in hospitals and witness continuously there. They find interested patients and ask them if they can visit and talk with them about the Lord and about the church.

Peter found himself in quite a time bind — trying to work two jobs and still find time to visit all the patients who were interested in rapping about the church.

Peter has come to know two quadraplegics in an Auckland hospital who are interested in making friends with other quadraplegics in other parts of the world. Anyone who knows of a quadraplegic who would like to share common interests, can communicate initially through E'in Jackson, secretary of MCC Auckland, POB 3897, Auckland, New Zealand.

In Middlemore Orthopedic Hospital in Auckland, Peter made the acquaintance of Mike, who is 30, and John, who is 27. Because all outdoor activity is cut off, they are now limited to indoor interests such as reading and music. They are especially keen on country and western music.

For the past many months, the Rev. Donald Mence has served as minister to the MCC Study Group. A Presbyterian minister who administers a number of parishes in outlying areas, Rev. Mence has been carrying a heavy load. Although he has been spreading himself very thin, Rev. Mence is very dedicated to serving MCC. He has left almost no free time to himself.

Peter reports that Rev. Mence preaches very moving sermons, that he is an outstanding minister and person — the kind of person who would go out of his way to do anything for anyone, gay or straight, any time.

Visitors to the Auckland worship services have commented that they have never seen such love anywhere before.

"We make a practice," Peter said, "of introducing every visitor to every member of the group personally and individually so that they can discover their common interests and go away knowing that person in the group is their friend."

The average attendance is about 20. "We place a lot of emphasis," he explained, "on acceptance and love for everybody. We do not ask questions about a person's lifestyle or anything like that. We concentrate on accepting them as persons."

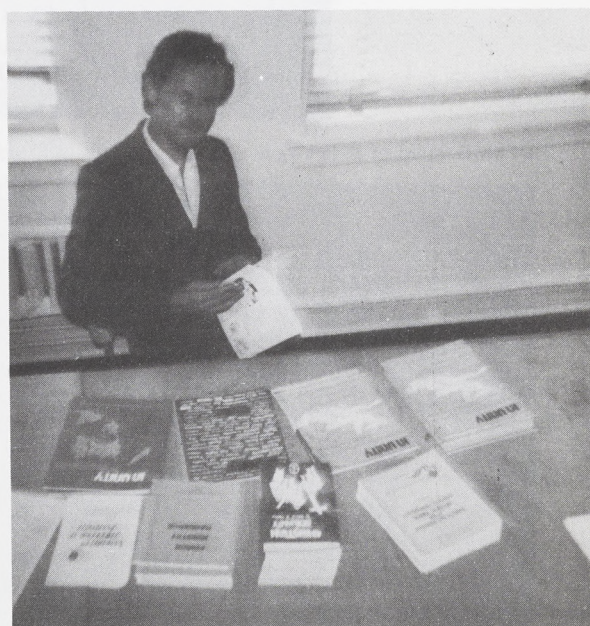
"There is much interest in Samaritan Theological Institute," Peter said, "and the people eagerly await each IN UNITY to learn what is happening in other MCC's around the world."

On his leaving Los Angeles, Peter left behind the following expression of his sentiments.

MCC LOS ANGELES

When morning comes
All but too soon
I know outside
I am leaving you.
Great joy I have found
In meeting all of you
A troubled heart
Now at peace within.
When night time comes
I dream not in vain
For in "Jesus Christ"
I know we will meet again.

God bless.
Peter ■



Bro. Peter Hurrock of MCC Auckland, New Zealand.

— staff photo.

London, England

We in MCC London naturally miss the loving closeness of Tom Bigelow, but we realize that our loss is Nashville's gain, and we know that the Lord has a great work for Tom there. Please convey to Tom the very dearest wishes of those of us in London who remember his work for Our Lord with gratitude and Love.

"Sunday October 10, promises to be a day of spiritual industry and thanksgiving. It involves our annual general meeting and the election of the board of directors, and is followed by the annual harvest festival . . .

"Please pray for us in the spirit of oneness. We seek only to do the Lord's will in all things and to give Him glory. But we are human, and sometimes fail. And so we, in MCC London, need the prayers of our brothers and sisters in MCC churches everywhere."

Zaria, Nigeria

Some months ago MCC Zaria was shocked by a move to evict them from property they had been renting.

The trouble came and went.

On September 4th, thieves broke into the Zaria Church and stole the tithe box. On September 6th, thieves broke in during the night again and removed all altar properties.

That was a severe blow for a poor congregation. But immediate steps are being taken to try to replace the stolen property.

Sunday School Teacher, Isaiah Ajero, writes, "Some of our members were asking why the trouble against us so much? I Peter 4:12-13 says, 'Do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering . . . rather be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings . . . ' Christ had already warned us about many troubles and persecutions. The handiwork of the wicked men cannot and will not hinder the progress of Christ's church, MCC. Glory be to God!"

We learn from a letter that the community is jubilant to "profess openly that our primary outreaching is also to recognize our women activities as equal church member ministering."

A new order in worship is being introduced soon.

Anchorage, Alaska

Pastor Gary Wilson reports that "people are coming forward as new members, board members, deacons, and exhorters — committing a heavy amount of time to the Lord . . . People are sharing problems and supporting each other — and all are rejoicing in the victories of each other. Jobs are being provided, promotions and raises granted and working conditions improving. Health (both physical and mental) is improving as the Lord heals. Relationships are coming into being or developing new vitality and strength. All this as we learn to turn to our God as the true source of all things."

Rev. Elder Freda Smith, "one of the most respected Christian/lesbian/feminist leaders in the United States," and Rev. Elder Jim Sandmire, "one of the leading preachers and great Christian politicians of the Fellowship," will preach the Spiritual Renewal in Anchorage November 11-14.

From "The Light of the North"
October 1976

Tucson, Arizona

The Rev. Al DeLabio, who served as worship coordinator for the Tucson congregation for the last seven months, has returned to California and is serving on Rev. Val Valrejean's staff at West Bay MCC in Santa Monica.

Exhorter Buff Fischer from Los Angeles is serving the Tucson congregation and reports that the Lord is really blessing the people and the ministry there with a growing congregation and a growing awareness of the Lord.

Fayetteville, Arkansas

MCC Fayetteville in Arkansas has changed its address to POB 4, Greenland, AR 72737. Ms Jan Reeder is Worship Coordinator.

Phoenix, Arizona

The Rev. Frank Crouch was installed as pastor of MCC Phoenix in July. Work continues on renovation of their property alongside the Maricopa Freeway.

The sanctuary ceiling has been completely redone and stands as a visible sign of those things which are happening within the people of the congregation, one of the four or five oldest churches in the Fellowship.

One member writes, "We are seeing committees organized with procedures, goals and excitement. A social committee has organized Sunday morning refreshments, a Halloween Party, an old fashioned ice cream social with bingo, and on going events."

"A finance committee has prepared for us a challenging budget that actually seems to be within our reach. It provides for more than just survival and actually looks toward fulfilling many of our dreams in the area of outreach ministry."

"Our Sunday morning attendance has been around 90 for the past six to eight weeks and we are beginning to have to look at the possibility of having two Sunday morning worship services . . . That's kind of neat to look at."

"The rest of our sanctuary remodeling should be complete by Thanksgiving and we hope to start work before Christmas on our social hall and office plans. In short, we thank God for working through people."



Rev. Frank Crouch and members at MCC Phoenix, AZ at coffee hour.



Members at MCC Riverside worship in parking lot outside of burned out shell of their church building.

Riverside, California

The Rev. Debbie Gendron has been elected pastor of Trinity MCC at Riverside, CA.

It was mid way through General Conference that the Fellowship was stunned by the news that the Riverside church had burned to a total loss.

"The immediate rallying of support for the little Riverside congregation demonstrated one of the beautiful traits of the Fellowship," remarked a veteran minister, "see how they love one another." They loved Riverside to the tune of thousands of dollars of donations on the spot and pledges of special gifts later. ■

In a letter to the editor, Rev. Gendron described her feelings after the fire and expressed her thanks to the Fellowship.

"I can not tell you of my feelings as I walked through the smoke damaged/fire damaged building. The feeling in my heart as I looked at the chalice that had burnt, the remains of the organ and piano that could hardly be recognized and the feeling of total emptiness as I looked to where the congregation had once sat, not more than six days before. I felt total desperation, emptiness, and pained for my family in Riverside. They finally stated (after many rumors) that the fire was electrical, found in a light fixture, and it was not the fault of the Church. I feel that Satan truly had a hand in this, however, because it was only three weeks before we had suffered a burglary and lost our typewriter along with clocks and fans!!

My feelings of despair left me, however, as telegrams, letters and other support came in from around the country. The Fellowship has also felt my sinking feeling but together our boat is not sinking but just being strengthened. Our Fellowship has been of tremendous help and support at the time when we most needed it here in Riverside and because of that, God will surely reward them abundantly. It shows the unity of our Churches, the strengthened growth that has taken place in the last eight years and reaffirmed the closeness felt at General Conference '76. How can you possibly thank your brothers and sisters for their unselfishness concerning money and prayers. I can not, but I can say that as we grow again, building on what we do have, each and every brother and sister will always be carried in a special part of our Riverside family's heart.

Since the fire we have found a temporary place to worship, an office to rent, the people have been renewed and dedicated, the Lord has moved new people to attend. There is still a lot that will be needed, but God will work it out in time." ■

Long Beach, California

The Rev. Lou Loynes, former elder and treasurer of the Fellowship, is now serving on the staff of MCC Long Beach where the Rev. Robert Cunningham is pastor. ■

Oakland, California

MCC East Bay at Oakland, CA has installed co-pastors, the Rev. Claudia Vierra and the Rev. John Barbone. It is believed this is the first MCC co-pastorate involving two ministers who are not in a spouse relationship with each other. ■

Pomona, California

City officials in Pomona, CA evidently didn't know who they were dealing with when they told the Rev. Robert Sirico that he "couldn't" hold worship services in a certain building.

For some time prior to September 26, 1976, MCC Pomona had been holding its services in the YMCA. This was satisfactory in some ways, but inconvenient in many ways, and they wanted a "place of their own" to call the House of the Lord.

They leased from the Bank of America an attractive facility on the tree-lined, flower bedecked, wired-for-music Pomona Mall in downtown Pomona, less than 30 minutes from downtown Los Angeles. They got it all painted and fixed up and announced their first service, which was dutifully reported in the local press.

Three days later the City Council passed an ordinance banning "store front churches." If waving a red flag in front of Toro does anything, waving a "prejudicial ordinance" in front of the Rev. Robert Sirico does more.

The service went on. The entire MCC Los Angeles 30-voice choir, led by Jimmi Irving was there to sing God's praise for the dedication of this House of Prayer and Praise.

The Rev. Paul Van Hoecke, founder of MCC Pomona, was there. Was he? They could hear him for blocks around. "We have come here to PRAISE THE LORD, not break the law. I'm

used to being illegal, but, praise God, I'm a Christian."

The Rev. Ann Montague, visiting in California on vacation from her pastorate in Eugene, Oregon, was representative of the many women in the congregation of more than one hundred who were there that night.

Other ministers, Rev. Richard Vincent, Rev. Debbie Gendron, Rev. Al Delabio, Rev. Robert Arthur, Rev. Val Valrejean, Rev. Richard Mickley, many others, Bud Bunce, Frank Zerilli, people from many of the nearby MCC churches, Riverside, the Valley, Santa Monica, Los Angeles, Costa Mesa.

"I will do everything I can to comply with the regulations for safety and building use," Rev. Sirico politely told the Building Inspector. But turning to the policeman on the other side, "I will do everything I can to fight an unjust ordinance which discriminates against a Christian people who want to assemble for the purpose of worshipping."

Police cars and patrolmen as well as fire inspectors and building code examiners hovered around the front entrance throughout the service. One official stayed inside. Afterwards he declared in front of the other officers, "I will go to court and testify that these people worshipped and worshipped in an edifying and orderly manner."

Since that day there have been several court appearances. MCC is still worshipping in their new home. The three other churches which had been meeting in store buildings were never bothered before. "The fight for freedom of worship goes on in the land of the free and the home of the brave," one observer was heard to say. ■

Ventura, California

Morris Kight, Sharon Cornielson, and Pat Underwood visited MCC Ventura recently to present the "Chairperson's Trophy" to the little congregation for its entry in the July 4th Gay Pride Parade on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles (Hollywood).

The committee has agreed that MCC Ventura "most touched the hearts of the judges." The beautiful engraved trophy is on permanent display in their own attractive church home in downtown Ventura. Rev. Virgil Scott is pastor.

Rev. Randy Cypherd, pastor of MCC of the Valley in North Hollywood and the Rev. Bob Cunningham, pastor of MCC Long Beach, and the Rev. Troy Perry preached for Ventura's unique spiritual Renewal in September.

"MCC Ventura has GOT to be the only Church in the Fellowship that ever invited me to sleep on the floor . . . now, that's really humbling the Moderator!" So declared the Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry Sunday morning, September 12 when he spoke at Ventura's Spiritual Campout which had moved into the Church because of the weekend's heavy rains. Scheduled for the weekend of September 10, 11 and 12 at Steckle Park outside Santa Paula, Ventura's second annual Campout smoothly moved indoors and several "campers," including Troy, rolled out the sleeping bags and roughed it on the floor Saturday night. Others moved their campers to the Ventura beach for the weekend, commuting to the spiritual services.

Nearly 60 men and women from San Luis Obispo to Long Beach attended the three-day spiritual renewal, theme of which was "Reach Out To Your Neighbor." In addition to Rev. Perry who spoke Sunday, morning and evening, the Rev. Bob Cunningham, pastor of MCC Long Beach, and the Rev. Randy Cypherd, pastor of MCC In the Valley, also preached sermons.

The Friday evening service was attended by a handful of MCC Ventura congregation, who at first were crestfallen to see their hard work and planning washed away by the pelting rain. But the service soon turned into one of agape love and the discussion centered around the phrase: "Nevertheless, praise the Lord." By Sunday evening, the spiritual renewal had built to a crescendo of love and togetherness that could not have been achieved on the campground.

Music was a highlight of the weekend. Lee Tuckness, pianist

for MCC Long Beach, knowing that MCC Ventura does not yet have a pianist to accompany services, volunteered his talents for the entire weekend. In addition, the Crescendos from MCC Los Angeles sang at every service Sunday. During the weekend, Rusty Carlson, MCC Long Beach, also sang a number of songs that thrilled the participants.

Included in the Saturday program was a workshop on Christian living in which participants were divided into three rap groups to discuss how each of us can bring a friend to Christ.

The Rev. Virgil F. Scott, pastor of MCC Ventura, proclaimed the Spiritual Campout a huge success: "We thought we were going to be camping out this weekend, but God had other plans. And, as is true whenever we let go and let God's will be done, the love, fellowship and spiritual experience were far greater than anything we could have planned," he said. ■

Los Angeles, California



Twenty-eight persons from Nacionalidades y lenguas Unidas who recently joined MCC/LA
— photo by Roberto Gutierrez

Services in Spanish are held each Tuesday evening at MCC Los Angeles.

Exhorter candidate Fernando Martinez is the leader of the group, which is, indeed, a Christian community in every sense of the word. Exhorter Bern David, who is bilingual, works very closely with Fernando and with the group.

In September, 28 members of the group were received as members of MCC Los Angeles by Pastor James Sandmire at a regular Sunday morning worship service.

The group has chosen the name "Nacionalidades y Lenguas Unidas," "Nationalities and Languages United." The name symbolizes the openness of the group to receive and welcome persons of any race, language, or color.

The Tuesday worship services are frequently bi-lingual and usually have an attendance of 60-70 persons.

On Wednesday evenings, 30-40 persons attend the Spanish language rap sessions led by Fernando and Bern at the church.

Weekly social events are sponsored by the group: dinners each Sunday in a home or the park or the church, dances, shows, volley ball, picnics, etc.

In recent months Rev. Sandmire, Rev. Perry, Rev. Don Pederson, Rev. Joan Johnson, Rev. Val Valrejean, Rev. Paul Van Hoecke, Rev. Richard Mickley and others have presented the message for the Tuesday services in English with simultaneous translation by Fernando and Bern. (Miguel Llamas Avila translated for Rev. Mickley.)

Fernando who is known throughout the Fellowship for his Spanish solos at the last four General Conferences, preaches for at least two services a month. Recently Fernando and his

friend Randy Hopkins had a long talk with his mother about their lifestyle and their Christian commitment. Now his mother is a regular attender of the Tuesday and Sunday worship services at MCC LA along with Miguel Avila's mother who frequently attends.

The group has organized a number of social and self help committees and their spirit of mutual love and concern is most edifying.

Recently 36 members of the group intelligently and impressively discussed their status and concerns for three hours with candidates for the MCC LA board of directors.

Many members of the group are active in social, educational, cultural, and religious activities of the "parent" church. Fernando and Bern have long been members of the Gospel Choir Ministry. Fernando and four members of the group brought the house down in their rendition of a Spanish Dance in the recent presentation of *Swan Lake* at MCC LA. ■



Who's Who in Religion, a companion volume to *Who's Who in America*, has listed the Rev. Troy D. Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches among its famous personages in religion.

The book is found in all libraries and is available from Marquis Who's Who, Inc., 200 East Ohio Street, Chicago, IL 60611. ■

MCC Los Angeles continues its search for a new pastor following the resignation of the Rev. Elder James Sandmire, effective October 31. Rev. Sandmire regretfully submitted his resignation in July in order to be able to spend full time on his increasingly pressing duties as an Elder, and treasurer of the Fellowship.

The celebration of the eighth anniversary of the founding of the church was climaxed on Sunday October 10 with Rev. Troy Perry, Founder, preaching.

The night before, Rev. Perry and Rev. Sandmire had starred, along with Rev. Donald Pederson, assistant Pastor, in an MCC Theater of the Performing Arts anniversary presentation of *Swan Lake*, directed by Bob Ennis. The large and illustrious cast also included such luminaries as Mrs. Edith Perry, The Rev. June Norris, Judy Bahn, Fernando Martinez, Frank Zerilli, Terry Foster, and many many other well known persons from the MCC stage.

The 1976 Pastor's Award were presented by Pastor Sandmire to Dr. Newt Dieter, Bob Ennis, Bill White and T.J. ■

Sacramento, California

MCC Sacramento observed the fifth anniversary of its chartering as a church in October.

The weeklong celebration culminated in the Sunday worship service, with the Rev. Elder Troy Perry preaching.

Other preachers included Pastor Freda Smith, Assistant Pastor Tom Taylor, Assistant Pastor Ralph Gordon, and Associate Pastors, Jerry Sloan and Marshall Williams.

As members of the congregation prepared God's house for the celebration, Rev. Freda looked over the sawing, painting, and cleaning and remarked, "I pray for indulgence of my pride in this church and in our people . . . May the Lord bless our 'showing off,' for we are only showing off how good God has been to us and how good God continues to be . . ." ■

San Luis Obispo, California

A faithful congregation, led by the Rev. Tere Ann Roderick, has begun worshipping in the city of San Luis Obispo, halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The first service in late summer (June 27, 1976) was a memorable occasion for Tere, her mother, her father, and the faithful people who had looked forward to having their own church.

Eleven members of the Ventura MCC congregation joined in the joyous celebration of worship, supporting this new work of the Lord. All enjoyed a picnic lunch in Mission Park afterward.

In October six members of the congregation traveled to Los Angeles to participate in the southwest district fall music chorale.

Mr. Robert Roderick, Rev. Roderick's father, was chauffeur for the 400 mile trip. ■



Ms. Judy Bahn (MCC/LA Treasurer) and The Rev. Donald Pederson (MCC/LA Interim Pastor) in a scene from the 8th anniversary performance of the ballet, *Swan Lake*.

— photo by The Peter Bannister Co.



Rev. Randy Cypher



Rev. Elder Troy Perry

The Crescendos

Hartford, Connecticut

The Administrative Board of MCC Hartford recently adopted an interim policy on the "Celebration of Relationships."

The policy rejects some traditional views on intimate covenant relationships and marriage. It establishes new guidelines for the "Celebration of Relationships."

Other news reported in September and October *MCC News*, published by the Hartford congregation, where the Rev. F. Jay Deacon is pastor, includes:

- an organizational meeting was held in mid October for gay mothers and fathers.
- the northeast district conference in October has "Women's Concerns" for its theme. Speakers will include Massachusetts state legislator, Elaine Noble, and Margaret Hougen of Boston, wife of MCC Boston Pastor, Rev. Ed Hougen.
- other interesting reports include: the Community Outreach program, The Alternative Lifestyle Project, Consumer Issues, Gay Switchboard, etc. ■

Atlanta, Georgia

In addition to the wall murals and the remodeled pipe organ, MCC Atlanta reports the Lord moving in other areas of the life of the church. Bill Leopard writes:

One Sunday night after services, a visitor arose, introduced himself and his mate, and said that he had had some recent experience as a music director. Inasmuch as our present director was only temporary and was having to leave within a month or two, the Board of Directors talked with this visitor and we now have Mr. Rick Carswell as our Director of Music, Mr. David Foster a baritone soloist, and Miss Ann Harrell a soprano soloist. To us in Atlanta, it just goes to prove that old saying that God helps those who help themselves.

The third major project underway at the Atlanta MCC is the Christian Education courses being conducted by Pastor Howard Wells. During the month of July, the Christian Education program was based on the book, "The Secret of Staying in Love" by John Powell, S.J. The month of August was spent studying

all the purported passages concerning homosexuality in both the Old and the New Testaments. Each month has seen an increase in attendance at the Tuesday evening courses (with attendance now averaging 35). One course upcoming that should see an increase in attendance by women will have the theme "God is Woman/Woman is God." This course consists of the study of the feminine element in the Judeo-Christian tradition, a facet of theology that is almost totally overlooked in patriarchally-oriented Judeo-Christian cultures.

As of this writing, the Christian Education program has yet to hit its highlight. This is scheduled over the weekend of September 17-19, and is a seminar to be conducted by Fr. John McNeill, S.J., on his just-released book "The Church and the Homosexual." This book has been three years in controversy over its publication and Fr. McNeill has just received permission to publish this year. Fr. McNeill, the founder of Dignity in New York, is one of the nation's most well-known and respected moral theologians, and between now and the scheduled seminar, he is scheduled to appear on several nationally-viewed talk shows including "Phil Donohue," "Tom Snyder" and "The Today Show." This seminar is being jointly sponsored by both MCC Atlanta and the Atlanta Chapter of Dignity. ■

Southeast District

The Southeast District held its summer meeting at Lake Byrd Lodge in Avon Park, FL.

The Rev. Keith Davis, District Coordinator, presided.

Workshops were held on "Contemporary Worship," "The Theology of Holy Union," "Community Relations," "Faith, Fellowship, and Order," "Sexuality," and "Parliamentary Procedure."

The Rev. Howard Wells, M. Div., Pastor of MCC Atlanta, preached for the Sunday morning worship service. ■

Tampa, Florida

The Rev. Lee Carlton and the Rev. Charles Larsen, former pastors, joined the present pastor, The Rev. Elder John H. Hose and the congregation of MCC Tampa for the celebration of their 5th anniversary just before General Conference.

On the occasion Pastor Hose, known as "Papa John" throughout the Fellowship, remarked, "The accomplishments in these five years are many: membership growth to 235, the development of offspring in Jacksonville, Pinellas County, Ft. Myers — and the sometime success of Orlando, Sarasota, Cocoa Beach. During that time, we purchased a building which will be completely paid for within a few years; put a new roof on it, rebuilt an organ (which was the gift of Art Fleschner), paid for a grand piano, received the gift of another piano, remodeled both buildings, painted and decorated inside and out, completely equipped a kitchen (recently received a gift of a new refrigerator), rewired the property, turned on a beautiful new air conditioning system and dedicated new pews . . .

"These accomplishments are beautiful to behold and think about. But I believe there are even more significant accomplishments to look forward to. More outreach into the community to rectify the injustices which are committed in the name of Jesus Christ! More person to person contacts which bring results — lives TOUCHED, CHANGED, IMPROVED because we exist . . .

"It is my prayer that in the years ahead, we will continue to reach out, touch, and help as many people as possible to realize that they are NOT alone, NOT friendless . . . that somebody cares . . ."

Champaign, Illinois

Metropolitan Community Church, Prodigal Child Parish of East Central Illinois, Box 5015, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820 has announced the name and address as given here.

Dr. Larry Auten, Attorney at Law, has been named worship coordinator of the Study Group in East Central Illinois. The territory served by the young Study Group extends through 11 counties in the center of the state adjacent to the state of Indiana.

Nearly twenty active people make up the present congregation of the group founded by Dr. Auten after a brief stay in Los Angeles last year during which time he had offered his time and talent as a volunteer in the Fellowship offices.

Dr. Auten's acceptance of the responsibility of Worship Coordinator comes after an extensive campaign was launched at General Conference to obtain a licensed minister to serve the people in East Central Illinois.

The first worship service was held on February 15, 1976. Prior to his appointment as Worship Coordinator, Dr. Auten had served as clerk of the congregation. He holds his M.A. and J.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Quincy, Illinois

This fall MCC Illinois celebrated its first anniversary as a Study Group in the Fellowship.

On Saturday evening they had a family style dinner at the Travelodge Motel with the Rev. Ken Martin, pastor of MCC Chicago, as dinner speaker. After dinner, all gathered at their church home on Maine Street for the anniversary worship service with the Rev. Elder Carol Cureton, preaching, and Rev. Martin administering Holy Communion.

The next day, Sunday, they had their regular Sunday worship service, again with Rev. Elder Cureton officiating.

Detroit, Michigan

In addition to their retreat in October at Clear Lake Camp, and in addition to their increased attendance of nearly 100 average, and the District Conference in Akron, OH on the October 22 weekend and Rev. Troy Perry's visit to preach to 150 for their 4th anniversary, and the honor of having one of their co-pastors, the Rev. Nancy Wilson, elected as an Elder of the Fellowship, the MCC Detroit congregation has stepped out in faith and arranged to rent additional space in their church home, Trinity Methodist Church.

This space will serve as the MCC Outreach Office. Co-pastor Heather Anderson is continuing to develop a dynamic outreach program in the areas of prison ministry; handicapped ministry; ministry to youth, to alcoholics, people who use, abuse, or are addicted to drugs; relating to social service agencies, and many other concerns. MCC Detroit believes these Outreach programs are essential to the mission and growth of the church.

Several persons have made a commitment to serve full time in the outreach ministry of the church.

Co-pastor Nancy Wilson remarked on the occasion of the church's anniversary, "We have an exciting, growing pastoral staff and a very dedicated board of directors. God has done great things in Detroit, and praise the Lord, if we are faithful, God will continue to bless us in the coming year."

The pastors, staff, and members of MCC Detroit are saddened by the transfer of The Rev. Kenneth Woodside who has been pastor of the host church in the four years MCC has been at Trinity United Methodist. They will miss him as host pastor. They will miss his frequent visits to MCC services. They will miss his helpful presence in the building. They will miss him as people always miss a friend who moves on.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

MCC of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul was presented its charter as a Church in the Universal Fellowship by the Rev. Elder Carol Cureton just before General Conference.

At the time of the presentation, Rev. Cureton reminded the Church to guard against "post-chartering blues," now that they had worked so hard and achieved their goal.

In September, The Rev. Joan Johnson, long time staff worker and minister at MCC Los Angeles, Chairperson of the Universal Fellowship Commission on Innovative Ministries, became pastor of MCC of the Twin Cities, succeeding interim pastor, Rev. Phil Crum.

When Rev. Johnson left MCC LA she remarked, "Leaving the church where you sort of 'grew up' isn't too easy. This is particularly true when there are programs you have started and have been so personally involved in as I have been."

"I am proud to say that each of the innovative ministries is being left in good hands. Rev. Jeff Pulling and Lucia Chappelle are involved in the Ministry to the Deaf, Bern David with the Convalescent Home Ministry along with Griff Gunther and the Chi Rho group. The Rev. June Norris will be working with the Chi Rho group and Flo Fleischman will work with the Maturity group. My alcoholism counseling will be left with Ed. McKernan. Praise the Lord."

Rev. Johnson has arrived with her spouse, Sandy Breitmeyer and their children. It doesn't look very likely that MCC of Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul will fall into "post chartering blues" with two such dynamos arriving there to work with them and keep the work of the Lord exciting.

New church home for the 200 member MCC Dallas, TX congregation; The Rev. James Harris is pastor.

Joplin, Missouri

The Rev. Phillip Crum, formerly pastor of MCC of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, is now pastoring the Study Group of MCC Joplin, MO.

New York, New York

Guest preachers for MCC New York while Pastor Gilbert Lincoln was away on vacation were, Father John McNeill, S.J., author of *The Church and the Homosexual*; the Rev. Robert Herrick of the National Gay Task Force; The Rev. Howard Gaas, District Coordinator and Pastor of MCC Brooklyn; and Dr. Ralph Blair, Director of the Homosexual Community Counseling Center, author of *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, and editor of the *Homosexual Counseling Journal*.



In July 11, 1976 the Metropolitan Community Church of New York was host to the Democratic National Convention. Their hospitality suite, located in the New York Hilton, was the first effort of its kind in gay rights history. The twelve hours of operation was the culmination of several months of effort and planning by the Social Action Committee of the New York church and typifies the emergence of their deep commitment to gay civil rights.

Visitors to the suite, which contained displays portraying various "ministries," covered the whole spectrum of human experience. All of the openly gay delegates to the convention made an appearance, including Jo Daly and Jim Foster of San Francisco and Clayton Wells of Los Angeles. Jean O'Leary, New York delegate, stopped by after the Women's Caucus and extended her best wishes to those assembled. Perhaps the surprise of the day were those deeply closeted gay delegates who sought out the suite as a haven of understanding and fellowship. Most felt assured they left with a new concept of gay pride. Also gratifying were visits by local political candidates and straight couples who had identified with what is basically a question of civil rights.

The suite was not the only scene of activity, however. Teams were sent out at periodic intervals to other delegate hotels to inform, question and improve gay visibility. Reactions varied, but were more often positive than negative. An MCC exhorter, sent to the Women's Caucus, received wide approval and many assurances of support. This is not surprising coming from a group all too aware of discrimination. MCC officials, pleased with the suite's acceptance plan similar functions in the near and distant future not only to educate the public on the gay rights question but also to educate gay people on the workings of our political system and how it can be changed from within.

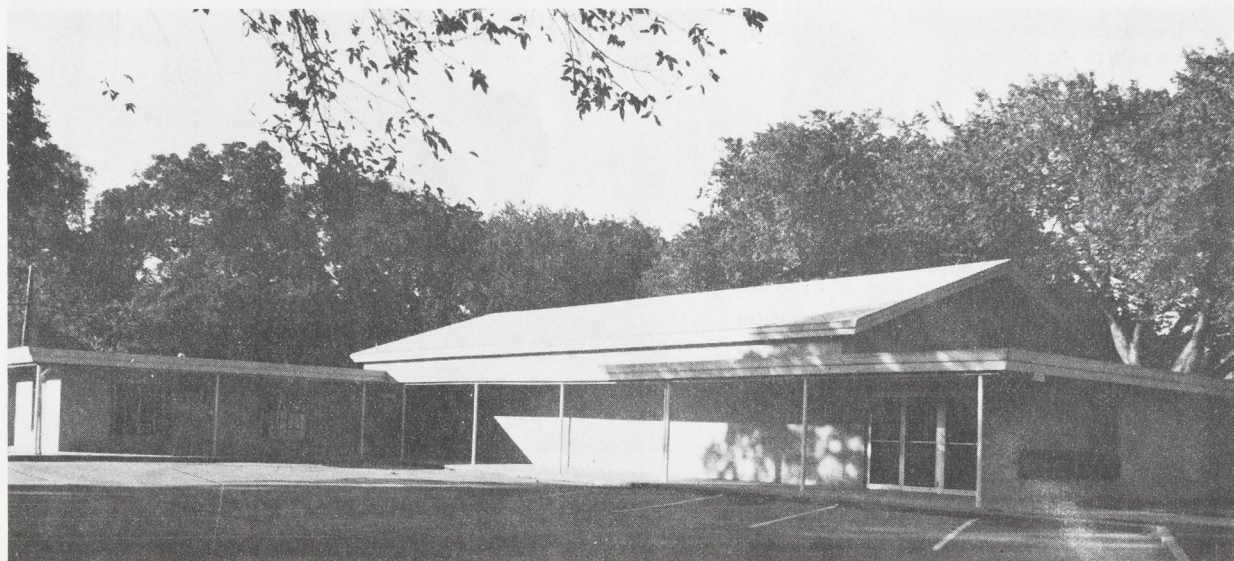
Robert Mehl of MCC New York was chairperson of the project.

Exhorter James Jarman and MCC New York members demonstrate at 1976 Democratic National Convention.

— photo by New York Post.

Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Rev. Walter Collins, who has been on the staff of MCC Tampa, FL for many years, has been chosen pastor of MCC Tulsa, succeeding Mr. Lee Mullendore, who has served as worship coordinator for the vibrant congregation.



Lee, a former minister in another denomination, radiates the love of God and it is no surprise that his family of Christians grew both in spirit and in numbers while he was worship coordinator.

Lee, well respected by the business and political leaders of Tulsa, will continue his plant and flower business and will continue to contribute his time and talent to building up the Body of Christ in Tulsa.

Dallas Texas

The prayers of Metropolitan Community Church of Dallas have been answered. In a congregational meeting held September 19, a quorum of members voted unanimously to leave the present facilities at 3834 Ross Avenue and to take the necessary steps to purchase a building located at 2701 Reagan.

Formerly occupied by the Church of Christ, the new building is believed to be the first building in the Fellowship to be owned by an MCC which was originally designed as a church and which has continuously been used as such. The purchase of the building follows a series of fund-raising events which included drag appearances and snakehandling by the recently ordained pastor, Rev. James C. Harris, under whose two years of leadership the congregation's membership has passed the 200 mark.

The first service in the new facilities was held October 10, with dedication services and open house planned for early December. The sanctuary has seating capacity for more than 350 people, plus an extra windowed room and nursery in which additional worshippers may sit. The building also features several offices, classrooms and a large yard.

Leaders in the Dallas church predict a healthy surge in attendance at the new building, which is located in the area of town where the gay population is most densely settled. Enthusiasm over the move has resulted in a positive attitude on the part of Dallas MCCers, as evidenced by the crowd that turned out to assist in the moving process.

MCC-Dallas has been especially blessed in that the property and building are both worth much more than the price being paid, as evidenced by new air conditioning only a few months old and the condition of the building and property values for vacant property lots in the same area. The building became available and on the market when the congregation formerly occupying it failed to maintain adequate attendance to justify the expense of maintenance. Financing has been extremely liberal and provides for no installments for the first six months of occupancy.

Dallas continues to extend a hearty Texas welcome to visitors from around the Fellowship in our beautiful new building, and IN UNITY readers everywhere are urged to drop by anytime they can come to this city.

Salt Lake City Utah

In November 1975, Pocatello, ID was approved for study of the feasibility of having an MCC Study Group there.

Recently members of the Salt Lake City, UT congregation met with a group in Pocatello. Their interest was amazing, reported one person who was there. Twenty people from the Idaho community showed up and joined the six who had come from Salt Lake City.

Plans are proceeding for place, time, and arrangements for worship services in Pocatello.

Rev. Alice Joines, pastor of MCC SLC invited the people from Pocatello to come to Salt Lake City in September for a time of sharing and uplifting.



Tulsa Worship Coordinator Bro. Lee Mullendore.

Nashville Tennessee

The Rev. Tom Bigelow, pastor of MCC London in the United Kingdom for the last two years, has been chosen pastor of MCC Nashville, TN.

Rev. Bigelow succeeds Steve LaFever, who has served as worship coordinator for almost two years. Steve is now serving on the staff of MCC Providence, RI.

Albuquerque, N.M.

The Rev. Kris Dodds, pastor and founder of MCC Albuquerque, was prevented from attending General Conference by post operative complications.

Steve Quesnel, Exhorter and Area Representative of Board of Institutional Ministry, attended the Southwest District Conference in Costa Mesa in November and reported that Rev. Dodds is still in failing health and requests the prayers of the universal church.



Rev. Kris Dodds (far right) and members of the MCC Albuquerque congregation.

Music & Murals

at MCC Atlanta

By Bill Leopard

Since the first of this year, the Metropolitan Community Church of Atlanta has been riding a rocket upwards in so many different programs, that every out-of-town visitor has gone away stunned by all the activity, the fellowship, and the talent that is being shown by the Atlanta congregation and its friends.

The most evident program that Atlanta has going is easily visible when you first walk into the Sanctuary. The Church is located in an old theatre building which they are presently purchasing. The walls of the Sactuary consists of five panels on each side, each panel being roughly 12 x 15 feet square. The panels have been stripped of the soundproofing, sealer applied to the bare masonry, and one of the friends of the Church, Mr. Claude Dudley, has started murals and paintings on the panels. Each side has a mural consisting of three panels, and

two different depictions on the remaining panels.

Mr. Dudley is no stranger insofar as murals on Church walls are concerned. He has already completed the murals for a Catholic Church in south Georgia. Mr. Dudley is also a published author.

The mural on the right side of the sanctuary as you walk in the door is a far-off landscape of the Holy Land after the Crucifixion. In the distance of the first panel, you can see Golgatha with the three crosses still standing. In the third panel, you can see the friends of Jesus who are carrying His body to a place where they can prepare it for a quick burial. The fourth panel will depict three scenes of Moses at various times in his life. The figure will be that of Moses with the tablets containing the Ten Commandments upraised. The fifth panel is a scene of the "Good Shepherd" feeding his sheep.

On the left side, the mural is a landscape showing the Sea of Galilee and the surrounding countryside. This will serve as a background for the depiction of various persons in the Old Testament — such as Adam and Eve, the prophets, Abraham, etc. The fourth panel is a depiction of the Ascension. The Choir and the Youth Group gave a monetary donation to the Church for this scene, and asked that it be dedicated to the memory of a choir member who recently died, and who had also been instrumental in the formation of the Atlanta Youth Group, and who served as one of their sponsors until her death. The fifth panel on the left side is "The Pieta."

None of the panels is in a final state.

The second most visible program, or perhaps I should say "audible" program, is the installation of a 3-39 (3 manual 39 rank) E.M. Skinner Pipe Organ. This was purchased from the historic Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah, Georgia, for approximately \$10,000 in June of 1974, approximately 4 months after we moved into this building. The purchase is being financed through a local bank, and is being paid for by Wednesday evening dinners at the Church prior to our worship service at 8:00 p.m. The cost of the installation is also being paid for through these same funds.



Bro. Charles Walker rebuilding the 3 manual, 39 rank E.M. Skinner pipe organ at MCC Atlanta.



Bro. Walker at the console.

The installation itself is being carried through by yet another friend of the Church, Mr. Charles Walker. Mr. Walker owns one of the oldest and most respected lighting and scenery studios in the entire Southeast. The congregation of MCC Atlanta went to Savannah on two separate weekends, dismantled the organ in the Church's balcony and belltower, and shipped it back in two rental trucks. When it was unloaded at Church in Atlanta, the parts were scattered all over the seats and floor of the entire Sanctuary and lobby. Not a few of the long-time members of MCC Atlanta ever thought that they would hear the voice of the organ again.

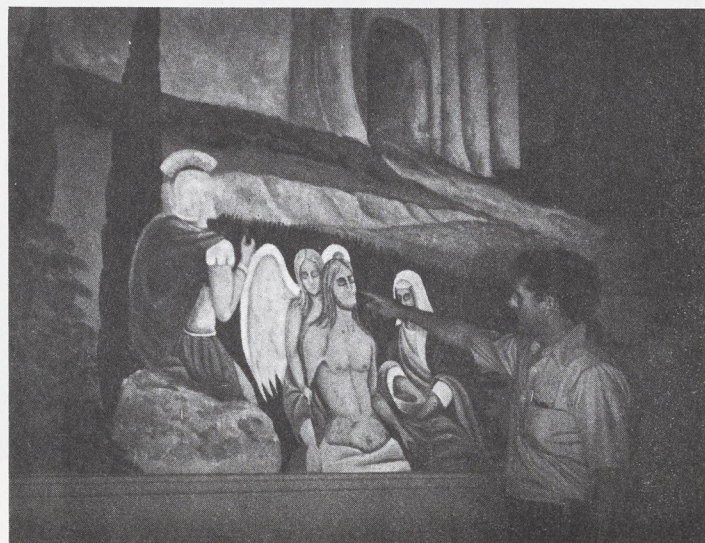
Through the perseverance and dedication of Mr. Walker, he has finally made a mountain out of a million molehills, and last Easter the organ finally made its first public sounds. In less than two years, working only about one night a week, the members and friends of MCC Atlanta, under Mr. Walker, have completely remodeled the sides over the exits on either side of the movie screen, added several floors for the various chests, put up ornamental pipes, and installed more pipes behind the movie screen itself. The blower motor had to be completely overhauled, and rewound, and the only remaining ranks to be installed are being delayed only because there is only one night a week for work.

As I said in the beginning, we are riding a rocket upwards. We could not stop moving upwards and onwards, any more than an astronaut could halt the rocket that is carrying him to the heavens, and after all, who would want to stop it? Isn't heaven where we all want to go? Join the rocket ride at MCC Atlanta, and have "the ride of your life." •



Artist Claude Dudley

"The Good Shepherd" dedicated to MCC Atlanta founding pastor the Rev. John Gill.



Artist with unfinished mural "Burial of Jesus."

NANCY WILSON

Continued from page 2

couple of Methodist churches in the area. And that old "nagging" returned with a vengeance.

In addition, all this time I had not dealt with my sexuality. My meager attempts at heterosexual dating were utter failures. I was aware, somewhere within me, of my intense feelings towards women, but I chose to remain entirely celibate. When my closest and dearest friend came out to me by letter in 1970, I went into a state of emotional panic. It took two more years, a lecture by Frank Kameny and Barbara Gittings at my college, developing friendships with several gay males, and falling in love with my roommate before I could finally admit to myself that I was, indeed, gay.

That was in the spring of 1972. In June, I graduated Phi Beta Kappa and cum laude with a B.A. in religion, and a Rockefeller Fellowship to the seminary of my choice. I went home, attended my first Gay Pride march in New York, and came out that night to my parents. I didn't really "come out." I sort of "fell out." My parents' reactions were typically negative at first. But I survived that, and so did they. Today they are much more open and accepting.

In September, having never heard of MCC, I went to Boston to attend B.U. School of Theology. Two weeks later, my roommates were listening to a "Gay Way" radio program, hosted by Elaine Noble. Her guest was Rev. Larry Bernier, and in addition to announcing the formation of MCC-Boston, he made an appeal for a woman to share the pulpit and the leadership of the group with him. (At that time, even in MCC, a very daring move!). And that clinched it for me. I called him, and we sealed our partnership over a bowl of clam chowder at Zeke's restaurant on Boylston St. Larry fascinated me. His enthusiasm was contagious. In fear and trembling I accepted our meeting as a turning point in my life. This was a part of the "Destiny" that stood in need of me . . .

I attended my first MCC

service that Sunday, at Arlington St. Church and was moved and shaken by this simple, Christian service, and by the *fact* of gay people worshipping together. I functioned for several months as an unofficial "assistant pastor" until our church was chartered in February of 1973. I was made an exhorter at that time, and was licensed to the ministry of MCC in Atlanta in 1973. Late in that same year I met Heather Anderson ("Destiny" strikes again!). In 1974 she started MCC-Worcester, and shortly thereafter we moved there together to become a team ministry (the first, I believe, in MCC).

In 1975, we accepted a call to Detroit, Michigan, sight unseen (on both parts), and the rest, as they say, is and will be history. I was elected to the Board of Elders at this past General Conference. I believe God has called me to serve in this way at this time. For what reasons, I am not sure yet. I ask for your prayers for myself, the whole Board of Elders, and our entire Fellowship.

It is impossible for me to briefly state the impact that being involved in this church movement called MCC has had on my life — spiritually, emotionally, and professionally. It is equally impossible to name all those in MCC who have so profoundly influenced and helped me grow as a minister, and as a Christian. I thank God daily for leading me to this Fellowship — and for all my colleagues, lay and clergy, who struggle together in our unique and important calling. It is an exciting time to be a Christian, to be gay, to be female, to be human. I can't think of anywhere that I'd rather be but struggling, praying, working and loving beside and with all of you. Amen! •

CHARLIE AREHART

Continued from page 2

more, Missouri. In January, 1974, Charlie left the Methodist ministry and began pastoring the Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies, Denver, Colorado.

Rev. Arehart was ordained a Deacon by The United Methodist

Church in 1969, and was ordained an Elder and granted full Annual Conference Connection in 1972. He was licensed by MCC in January 1974, and was ordained by MCC in August, 1975. He has been honorably transferred from the ministry of the United Methodist Church to the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

He served as the Assistant District Coordinator for the Mid-Central District (UFMCC) August 1974, to August 1975; and as District Coordinator of the Mid-Central District, August 1975 to August 1976. He served on the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee at the Seventh General Conference. At that Conference he was elected to serve MCC on the Board of Elders.

Charlie has always been active in service organizations. He is an Eagle Scout with three palms; the former Master Counselor of the Raytown Chapter Order of DeMolay. He is a member of Raytown Masonic Lodge No. 391, Raytown, Missouri, is a 32 degree Scottish Rite Mason, and is a member of the Shrine.

Perhaps the most important part of Charlie's ministry is his honesty — with himself and others. Prior to his coming to Denver, he sent the leadership of the MCC of the ROCKIES (Mission) a letter which stated in part:

"I've been gay ever since I can remember . . . I was gay that evening when I knelt in my bedroom and asked Christ into my heart at the age of eighteen . . . I was gay in September, 1967, when I stood on the infield of the Kansas City Athletic's stadium after the Billy Graham Crusade meeting and felt God impress His demand that I preach deep into my heart . . . I was gay all the way through Seminary as I studied . . . and I'm still gay. God knows me better than I know me . . . and now I see an outline of the path I am to take. I'm ready to align myself with MCC."

And so it is! •



Samaritan Theological Institute

Samaritan Theological Institute began its seventh year of training men and women for the professional ministry of the UFMCC with a Fall Convocation hosted by West Bay MCC at the Unitarian Community Church, Santa Monica, California. This was an opportunity for the students, faculty, and trustees of Samaritan to start the new school year with worship and fellowship. The Rev. Jeffrey Pulling was the preacher for the evening, and the Rev. Richard Ploen celebrated Holy Communion. It was a simple and enjoyable evening.

STI has currently 29 officially enrolled students, which includes 17 men and 12 women. For the Fall Quarter courses in residence 17 students registered. The others are enrolled in correspondence courses only or are on leave. In their correspondence course program STI has currently 39 persons throughout the Fellowship enrolled (16 men and 23 women). Of these presently pursuing correspondence courses, 12 are officially enrolled STI students and are receiving credit toward graduation from STI for their completed courses. Eight persons have completed a STI correspondence course.

The institute now offers five courses in residence per academic quarter. This Fall Quarter STI has offered "Introduction to the Bible," "The Life and Teaching of Jesus," "New Testament Greek I," "The Early Church," and "Public Speaking." The Winter Quarter schedule includes "Old Testament History," "New Testament Greek II," "Ethical Principles," "Christian Education," and "Sermon Preparation."

The academic year has three 11-week quarters: Fall Quarter (September to November), Winter Quarter (December to February) and Spring Quarter (March to May). There is also a flexible Summer Quarter when elective courses are offered.

The faculty of Samaritan Theological Institute includes The Rev. Jeffrey Pulling (Dean), The Rev. Robert Arthur, The Rev. Laurence Bernier, Ms. Sandy Breitmayer, The Rev. Richard Mickley, The Rev. Richard Ploen, The Rev. James Sandmire and Ms. Karen Wheeler.

At their fall meeting the Board of Elders appointed Ms. Karen Wheeler as President of Samaritan Theological Institute and the Rev. Jeffrey Pulling as Dean. The Rev. Richard Ploen and The Rev. James Sandmire were appointed Trustees. ●

Correspondence Courses

Samaritan Theological Institute is now offering six correspondence courses. Available now are two courses in Biblical Studies: "The Old Testament Prophets" and "The Life and Teaching of Jesus"; and one course in Theology: "God." By January 1, 1977, three more courses will be ready: a course in Church History: "The Early Church," another course in Biblical Studies: "Introduction to the Bible," and a Practices course: "Institutional Ministry." These courses are an attempt of Samaritan Theological Institute to serve persons throughout the Fellowship, especially those who find it impossible to come to Los Angeles to enroll in courses in residence offered by the institute. All STI courses are designed for the continuing education of clergy and the training of exhorters for the professional ministry, but the courses are open to any MCC member and friend.

All Samaritan correspondence courses have ten lessons of home study. For each lesson there is a reading assignment, study guide questions, and a test. Each student is free to move at his/her own pace through the course. There is no set schedule for beginning or ending a course. The individual student decides when to start the course, at what rate to do the lessons, etc.

The courses vary in level and format. "The Life and Teaching of Jesus" is an introductory-level course. It has short reading assignments, and the test questions are mostly multiple-choice. "The Old Testament Prophets" is an intermediate-level course. The reading assignments are quite extensive, and the test questions require short essay answers. "God" is an advanced-level course. The reading assignments vary in length for this course, and the test questions, for the most part, call for short essay answers. Both "Introduction to the Bible" and "The Early Church" will be introductory-level courses, and their tests will have mostly multiple-choice questions.

Samaritan Theological Institute's correspondence courses are open to everyone. Each course costs \$40, which includes textbook(s), study guide questions, tests, and correction of tests at STI. To receive credit toward graduation from STI, a corresponding student must fulfill the admission requirements of the institute, complete the application procedure, and become an officially enrolled Samaritan student.

Anyone who wishes to enroll in one of Samaritan's correspondence courses or who wishes more information about

the institute, should contact the Rev. Jeffrey Pulling, Dean, Samaritan Theological Institute, P.O. Box 5570, Los Angeles, CA 90055. ●

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A special thanks to MCC St. Louis for the description of IN UNITY in their September newsletter. After three paragraphs of nice compliments, the article concludes:

"If you haven't been a regular reader of IN UNITY, certainly the August 1976 issue is a good place to start. Interesting, informative, and truly representative of the new directions of the Fellowship, this is a magazine that everyone can afford to buy and can't afford to miss."

*From The New Light,
September 1976, MCC St. Louis*

I so look forward to IN UNITY and usually find myself up all night reading "the latest" with MCC's all over the world. The Gay Christian is especially important to me and I've been able to share that with a very dear straight friend of mine.

*Mary Jane Weber
San Jose, CA*

The August issue was the best I've seen to date.

IN UNITY brings our 100 congregations in seven nations across the globe much closer in unity, in heart and spirit.

It tells us a little about each other, how we are all different, but still share the same heart beat.

The Conference in DC was my first, and Bill and I both made many new decisions for Christ.

*Bill and Vaughn
Chicago*

THANK YOU

IN UNITY extends a thank you to Brother Andy Dybdall of Los Angeles for presenting us with some past year's issues of IN UNITY.

We again urgently request our readers to look around their home or church files and see if there are any issues of IN UNITY (before October 1975) which they would be willing to send to us for completing our files lost in the Union Street fire.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL, John J. McNeill, S.J., Sheed Andrews and McMeel, Inc., Kansas City, 1976. Order from: Dignity International, 755 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116. \$10.00.

More than twenty years ago Sherwin Bailey published a classic study, *Homosexuality in the Western Christian Tradition*, "which still remains the outstanding scholarly work on the subject," (in Father McNeill's words).

Dr. John Boswell will soon publish a book presenting with unprecedented historical depth and scholarly acumen an exposition of the attitude of early and medieval Christianity toward homosexuality and gay people. It will include the most comprehensive study to date of New Testament references to homosexuality. It will be a full length development of the ideas expressed in his address to the MCC General Conference in Washington, 1976.

But today, here and now, **THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL** is *the* scriptural, historical and ethical study of homosexuality which does what no other book has done, which goes beyond any other study. It is a scholarly work, presenting homosexuality in a light which brings it out of the shadows of ignorance and prejudice like no other study ever has. Its Christian perspective is especially valuable for Christians.

Father McNeill not only fits the Jesuit stereotype of being learned, he is a scholar and theologian par excellence with ample credentials to give him credibility, a top notch publisher to give him a wide audience, and with experience in Dignity to make him real as well as scholarly.

Father McNeill goes far beyond Father Bailey, the noted Anglican authority on sexual ethics, because he has the benefit of all the scholarship — psychological, sociological, biblical, historical, ethical, behavioral — which has become available in the last twenty years.

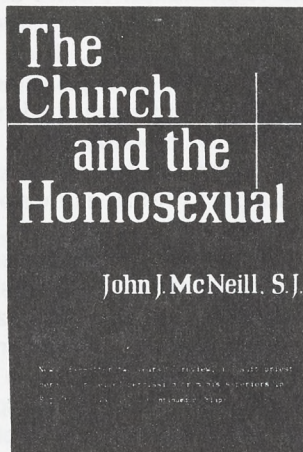
And he has the advantage of the new sociological atmosphere of the gay liberation era; the era of a world-wide MCC, the era of Dignity and Integrity and the denominational caucuses; the era of the many gay rights organizations; the era influenced by Newt Dieter and others of the National Gay Task Force working to eliminate destructive and derogatory stereotyping and present a positive im-

age of gay people in the entertainment media.

This book is monumental. It uses technical language and extensive footnotes. But that's the kind of book it is — scholarly. Don't settle down in an easy chair for an evening of easy reading (although a couple of my intellectual friends did read it in one sitting). *The Church and the Homosexual* is not *The Fancy Dancer*. Father McNeill injects quite a bit of untranslated Latin to the detriment of complete understandability. (In each instance I verified this translating to see if there were hidden meanings lurking sub rosa.) But the reader who swims through the deep spots keeps on finding intellectual treasures on every page.

Looking over my notes I find that I could write a book length review, but, alas, it would be better to leave the book for the reader. Let me pick out a few salient features.

The author examines not only Scripture but tradition in tracing the



development of homophobia from Genesis to Hitler, weaving in the research and insights of all scholars between Bailey and himself.

I found particularly appropos, though not altogether original, his analysis that Scriptural and Patristic writings referring to "homosexuality" showed no awareness of the homosexual condition, but always proceeded from the assumption that homosexual acts are merely sexual indulgences undertaken from a motive of lust by otherwise heterosexual people.

To date, no completely satisfactory book had been published dealing with the passages of Scripture traditionally accepted as dealing with homosexual behavior. Father McNeill claims not to be a Scripture scholar. But we have to

remember that he speaks from a perspective that only accords the title "theologian" to select and recognized scholars, usually with multiple doctorates and a world wide reputation. Similarly, a "bible scholar," at the least, is one with advanced degrees *in scripture* and extensive experience in research and teaching Bible studies on the university level. Being a Jesuit, where all are scholars, he recognizes the specialties of his peers and does not claim to be an expert in all fields. His speciality is "moral theology."

One of the marks of a "scholar" is the ability to make use of the works of "scholars." Father McNeill has done this well in putting 20 years of recent scholarship input into his book.

The author concludes his 14 page discussion of Sodom and Gomorrah by pointing out "one of the supremely ironic paradoxes of history." And the irony is this: if inhospitality was the real sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, homosexuals have been the victim of inhospitality in the Christian church for 2000 years — all in the name of Sodom and Gomorrah which the church used as the basis for its inhospitality to homosexuals."

Perhaps my favorite passage in the whole book (and it's hard to choose because it's all so good) is on page 145-146 where he describes the characteristics which the healthy homosexual and Christ have in common . . . "Christ was an extraordinarily full human person and extraordinarily free human being . . ."

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CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY

Father McNeill paradoxically shows a genuine interest in the concept of justice for women (women's liberation). But it is frequently marred by his lack of sensitivity and failure to use inclusive language. For example, on page 147 he exhorts all brothers and sisters to reach mature manhood.

In discussing the positive aspects of homosexual persons, he points out with Jung that they are endowed with a wealth of religious feelings and spiritual receptivity. This reminded me of a similar statement by Rev. Troy Perry in his autobiography, "The religious feelings of these, my people, are very deep."

Part 2, "Toward a Positive Approach of Moral Theology," is excellent.

Sometimes the subtleties and abstractions and erudite approaches of this book would seem to make it difficult for some people to get the full value of it. But the book had to be written. There's too much deep, helpful, resourceful scholarship here to let it go unpublished.

And I think I'll close with a comment on its publication. Thank God, it's published — and without compromising the author's position or principles. Father McNeill is a Jesuit, voluntarily under obedience to his superiors. His manuscript was held up for two years and he was silenced from speaking and writing on the subject while his superiors in Rome and in the United States pondered the fate of his tradition-defying scholarship.

When the permission came in the form of an "imprimi potest" (It can be printed) from his New York superior, Father McNeill, by waiting patiently had achieved an unbelievable first. The book is the first officially sanctioned Roman Catholic work presenting a view of homosexuality as healthy, a view contrary to papal teaching. By going this route Father McNeill allowed his book to be accepted into the mainstream of Catholic debate and reflection.

I recommend *The Church and the Homosexual*. It should be in the office of every minister who wants the best ammunition available for combating the myths, stereotypes, and prejudices based on centuries of misinformation and misinterpretation. It should be in the library of every layperson who wants to have on hand *the* book which says it best. ●

review by Richard R. Mickley

The review as printed here is excerpted from the full length review published in the Dignity International newsletter, October 1976 (755 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116).

THE REVIEWER

Fr. Bob Nugent, sds, is a Salvatorian priest and a co-director of the Quixote Center, a justice oriented community, in Maryland. He is also co-author of **HOMOSEXUAL CATHOLICS: A PRIMER FOR DISCUSSION** and is engaged in gay ministry in the Washington, DC area, a Chaplain of Dignity/Washington.

CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY, Published by Universal Fellowship Press, Los Angeles. Written by Richard R. Mickley. Obtain from Universal Fellowship Press, Box 5570, Los Angeles, CA 90055.

Recently I have been hearing an increasing number of gay Catholics both within and outside the Dignity community speaking in terms of "guidance" on making decisions about sexual behavior and relationships. I don't think these individuals are asking for a new set of Gay Ten Commandments. They do seem to be seeking for some guidelines or help in struggling with some fundamental issues relating to responsibility in their sexual lives which can lead to a richer, happier and more Christian expression of an integrated sexuality.

Discussions of "gay ethics" never fail to produce strong heated responses if the individuals feel that their particular lifestyles or behavior patterns are being challenged or even called into question in light of the Christian gospel. Norman Pittinger has done some excellent work in this area and Fr. John McNeill touches on it both in his talks and in his recent book.

Roman Catholics will benefit greatly from Richard Mickley's *Christian Sexuality*. The author's Roman Catholic background (studies for the priesthood, parish experience, courses at several Catholic institutions) gave him a rather good feeling for the Catholic situation. He is presently Director of the Department of Publications of the Universal Fellowship of MCC, and editor of *IN UNITY*, undoubtedly one of the classiest gay, Church oriented publications.

While Mickley claims that his book is "more evangelical than theological" (and there is certainly ample evidence to support this), the work will stand careful theological scrutiny. Mickley has done his homework rather well, and has brought together some of the more contemporary strains of ethical and moral thinking. He attempts in the work

to show what it means to be human, sexual, Christian, (which includes the other two qualities) and moral. I found the chapters on being Christian and being moral among the best in the whole book.

While refusing to give detailed answers to specific cases (he understands the complexity of applying Christian principles to life situations) he doesn't hesitate to state openly in at least one instance which he illustrates that "Under those conditions, sex is wrong." Sexual relationships (straight as well as gay) *can* be cruel, impersonal, irresponsible and inordinate. (If your body makes all the decisions and gives all the orders, and if the whole of you obeys, then the physical can effectively destroy every other dimension of your personality.)

I was especially pleased with his Biblical analysis of what it means to be a "new Person" in Christ (a dimension. I find conspicuously lacking in most discussions on homosexuality and the Christian life.) If it is human love that gives meaning to human sexuality, then it is Christian love that gives meaning to Christian sexuality. We could debate whether there is any real difference between the two! Christ's love for us is a love that involves the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection throughout every dimension of life including our sexuality. The real question that Catholic gays should ask themselves is: Where is the Paschal Mystery in my sexual loving? Love is authentic when it most closely mirrors the unselfish love of Christ for us. Perhaps our real problem is attempting to experience what real love is, and it is much more than simply a name we give a relationship. Acts of exploitation and even brutality (the Crusades and the Inquisition) were committed by people who honestly believed they were expressing unselfish love. As Reinhold Niebuhr reminded us, human being are "never as dangerous as when we act in love."

I think that the Mickley book is one of the most helpful in the struggle that gay Christians have with integrating a joyful, guiltless celebration of human sexuality as a gift of God and the call of the gospel to live and love the death-resurrection of Jesus.

To be Christ like, as Mickley says, is to be "fully human, humanly sexual, wholly Christian and freely moral." The book is a good elucidation of what each of those phrases means. *I'd recommend the book as required reading for every gay Catholic* who has been "away from the church" and for all gays still functioning on the Baltimore Catechism diet. ●

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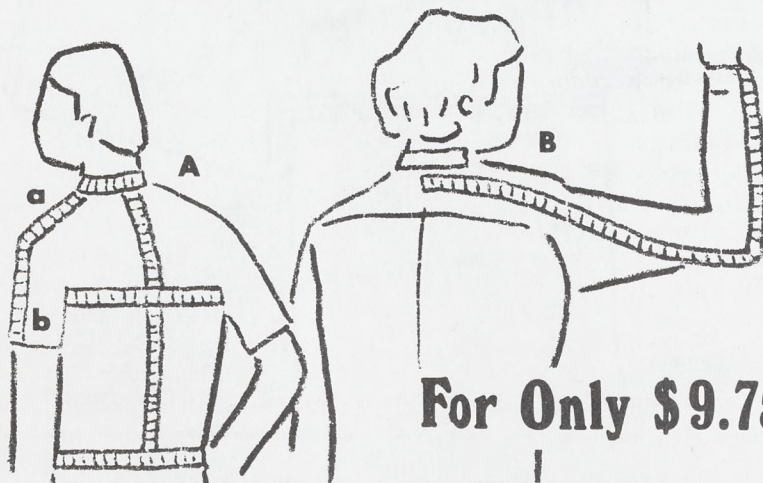
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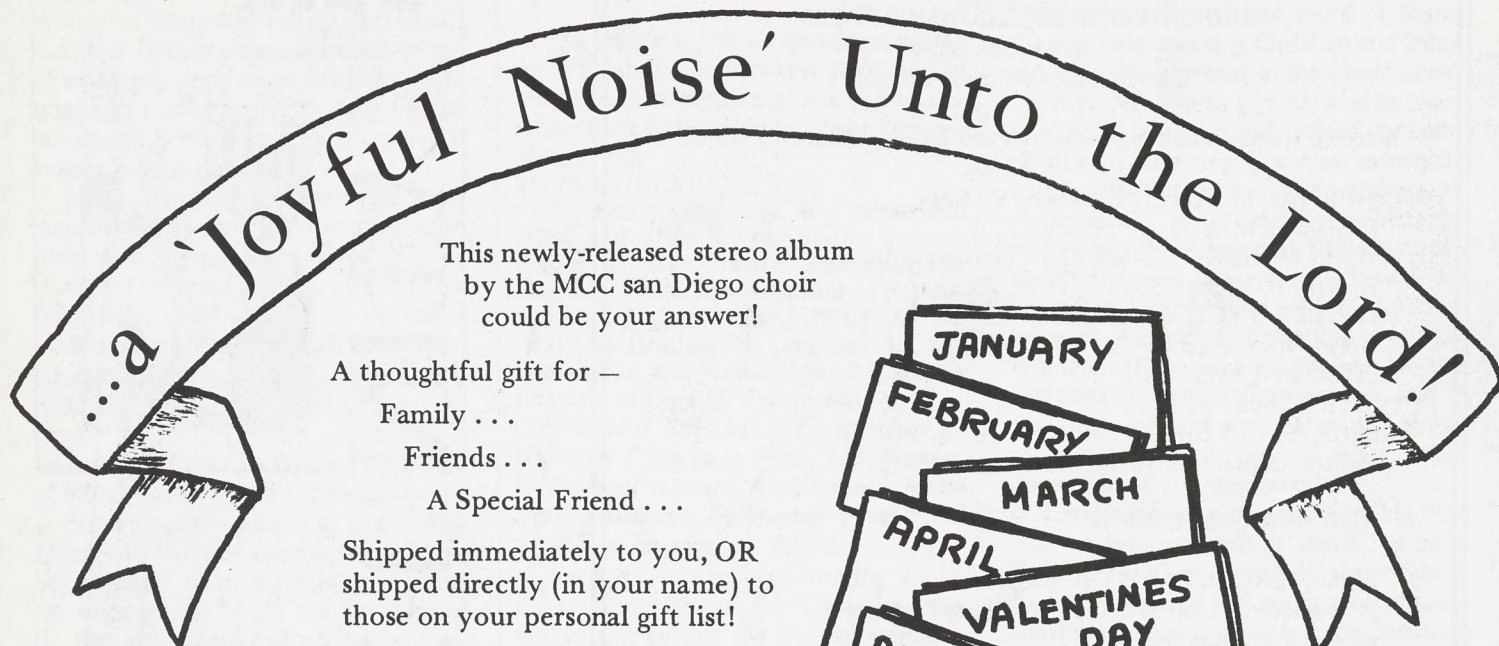
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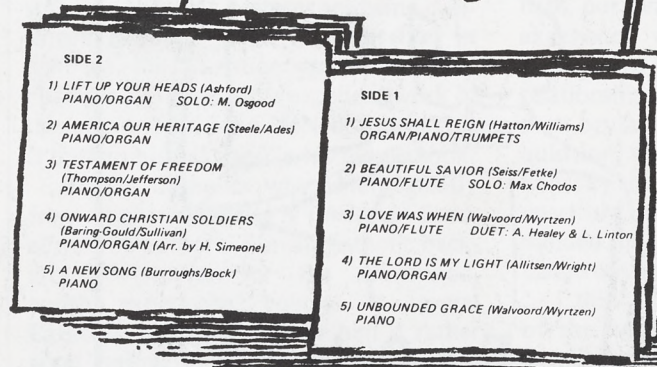
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